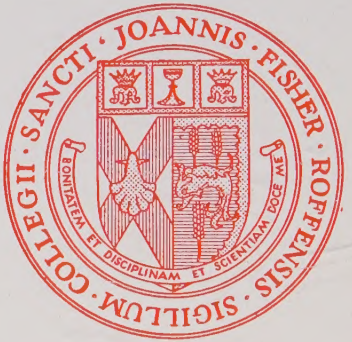

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TO

K. M.

MY FELLOW EXPLORER

INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO THE FIRST EDITION

I HAVE called these essays and lectures by a title that some people may think presumptuous: first, because it is the title of a book by Ben Jonson, and second, because it could be interpreted as meaning that I think there is something final in the results of these explorations of mine.

For the first, I believe the fine ghost of Ben Jonson will forgive me. For the second, I do not believe there is anything final in criticism. But I wanted my title to contain a suggestion of the curious elation which criticism sometimes brings to me. 'To me,' I insist, because I subscribe wholeheartedly to the famous dictum of Anatole France that criticism is the adventures of a man's soul among books. More and more criticism appears to me to be an intensely personal affair. Every honest critic—and by an honest critic I mean a man who builds his schemes and classifications solely on the basis of his own reactions—makes a great cross-section of the universe of literature in accordance with his temperament. What he is and believes is more surely reflected in his criticism than in his direct professions of faith. The more he can lose himself in the object, the more himself he is. And the excitement of losing oneself in exploration, the elation of being possessed by the very process of discovery, is the most precious thing I have found in criticism. Most of these essays and lectures are the records of what were,

when I made them, not discoveries in any absolute sense, but simply discoveries for me.

Some of them appeared originally, in a slightly different form, in *The Times Literary Supplement*, others in *The Quarterly Review* and *The Yale Review*. Three of them were lectures which, it seemed to me, would have gained nothing by being re-written as essays.

P.S.—For the purposes of this reprint, three essays which seemed of little value have been discarded and replaced by four shorter, and I hope better ones, namely, 'Gogol,' 'The Case of John Clare,' 'American Poetry,' and 'The End of Herman Melville.'

THE NATURE OF POETRY

And now it seems to me intolerably presumptuous that I should have chosen this title for the little I have to say. I chose it in a moment of excitement when I was possessed by the curious exaltation that comes to a critic as he begins to disengage—as he believes—the central, golden thread of a poet's being. You know, of course you know, the small wise sentence of Anatole France to the effect that criticism is the confession of the adventures of a man's soul among books. The older I grow as a critic, the more essentially true does that sentence seem to be. Whether it is that I have some special liability to such adventures, or that my mind is such that the adventures I do have take a peculiarly exciting form—I cannot say; but the fact is that there are moments when criticism of a particular kind, the only kind I care for, utterly absorbs me. I feel that I am touching a mystery. There is a wall, as it were, of dense, warm darkness before me—a darkness which is secretly alive and thrilling to the sense. This, I like to believe, is the reflection in myself of the darkness which broods over the poet's creative mind. It forms slowly and gradually gathers while I read his work. The sense of mystery deepens and deepens; but the quality of the mystery becomes more plain. There is a moment when, as though unconsciously and out of my control, the deeper rhythm of a poet's work, the rise and fall of the great moods which determined what he was and what he wrote, enter into me also. I feel his

presence; I am obedient to it, and it seems to me as though the breathing of my spirit is at one with his.

These are vague words: I have none better to offer at this moment. But I believe that this condition I have so roughly described marks a crucial point in the process of understanding an author's work. In one sense it is then and then only that you *know* the work—in this sense you will never know it more; it has now grown into your deepest life-experience, you have entered into a secret communion with a master-spirit and a strange possession has been made yours for ever. But, in yet another sense, this is the moment at which you know the work least of all. For when apprehension is most direct, then is it most mysterious. Not in literature only, but in all things, throughout the universe of life of which literature is the symbol and the flower. In all things the directest and truest apprehension we have is a sudden communication, a sudden communion rather, between mystery and mystery. This is true of the attitude of the man of science towards the ultimate constituents of reality—there is in all great scientific discovery a sudden and unexpected accommodation of the mind to something which is by the process which brought the mind to that point, strictly unthinkable: there is a mysterious change in the very nature of thought in order that it may make a closer contact with the nature of reality. We may call it a sudden leap, a sideways leap—it is the prerogative of scientific genius. But in things simpler to understand and more common to the general experience, the same great

process holds. The understanding between those who truly love each other is beyond the reach and scrutiny of their conscious intelligence. They love each other; but they do not know why or how. The relation is at once too simple and too strange to be understood.

Of the same order is our knowledge of a work of literature. It is, when it is most perfect, a simple apprehension. It may have taken days, or months, or even years of labour to reach it; a time during which we are held to our task by the fascination of a tale or the incidental beauties of its telling; when we live, as it were, from hand to mouth, with an almost childish delight in the succession of sights and sounds unfolded before us. It is perhaps only an instinctive presentiment that there is more to come, or a dim awareness that there is an obligation upon ourselves to try to dominate a work which so obviously seems to dominate us, which keeps us reading and re-reading, ordering and arranging, half-consciously following half-apprehended clues, patiently yet almost blindly, until we have a sense of the whole work as the tangible garment of a living yet intangible spirit, just as beneath the stone drapery of one of those headless and heroic goddesses of Pheidias in the Louvre, after long and patient contemplation, we feel, we seem with our bodily eyes to see, the divine and hidden limbs subtly stirred by the breath of life. This is the moment of knowledge; when all the words that a poet has spoken, all the characters that a novelist has created, appear to us as things-in-themselves no longer, but as the inevitable

conditions, the necessary garment of invention through which a living yet secret reality was compelled to manifest itself in the material world. There comes a moment when we seem to break through these conditions to that which is beyond them; we seem to make contact, immediate, full, and mysterious contact, with something for which we have no single word. We shall describe it, if we belong to that class of human beings which is driven to describe things in order to be able to evoke them by their names when the reality is departed, according to the context established beforehand by our habits of mind and soul — we shall call it God, or a deeper reality, or the music of the spheres, or the love that moves the sun and the other stars. I prefer, just at this moment, to call it a rhythm of life. For there is motion in it, there is growth, there is fulness, there is a downward plunging to darkness and an upward soaring to light; it is a vital motion. In the greatest writers there is something grand and terrible in the sheer magnitude of this rhythmical upward and downward sweep of their secret path; in the lesser it is constrained and circumscribed; but in all writers who can claim a permanent validity the governing rhythmical motion is there. There are great waves and little ones; waves of the ocean, and waves of the land-locked sea.

An immediate contact with this motion as it governs a writer's work, a sense of it so close and so instinctive as to be wellnigh physical, as though the great wave had caught us away from our personal selves and bore us with it, part of its substance, in its thrilling and sickening

rise and fall, is, I believe, the appointed utmost of our knowledge of a writer. Then we know him indeed with a knowledge that time cannot diminish; we have lived with him, but with him impersonally, with what he was, not with what he appeared to be. All that we can do, if we are by nature fore-ordained to this form of wrestling with the ineffable, is to try to make partially explicit this knowledge that we have: to try, if we are critics, to show where the temporal garment is thinnest and sits closest to that which is beneath, to indicate the moments when the motion is most visible, to follow out in the very structure and detail of the work the secret pattern to which we have the key.

Moreover, I think that we are bound, are by our own nature compelled, to wrestle more and more with that which is greatest. After all, I believe that criticism is a personal affair, and that the less we critics try to disguise this from ourselves the better. On what excites and attracts and fascinates us in pursuit of our own completion, in obedience, if you like, to our own secret rhythm which we also must have if our work is to be vital at all—on that alone we shall have something to say worth hearing. If criticism is indeed, as I believe it is, the confession of a soul's adventures among masterpieces, then the greater the adventure, the greater the interest and value of the confession. A record of trivial encounters in books and in life, must become merely boring, if the recorder himself found them trivial. Perhaps the best critic is the one who finds no encounter trivial; I can admit it, and still be

content to acknowledge that I am not of that kind. We are what we are, and though we come to the knowledge late, we come to it with relief, with something of the same audible relief with which Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Confessions* declared, *J'ai pris mon assiette*—'I have taken my stand.' And we hear behind it the muttered implication: 'I will no longer be bothered with that which does not interest me; I will no longer torment myself to be like other men.'

This lecture is supposed to be about 'The Nature of Poetry.' You will say that it seems to be about anything else rather than that—about criticism, and statues in the Louvre, and queer, semi-mystical things call 'rhythms of life.' I admit it—at all events it is true so far—and it is true so far precisely because, when I re-read the substance of my lecture a little while ago, it seemed only too likely that you might think it true at the end. I began this introduction with the desire to apologise for any disappointment I might cause you; but it is only too plain to me now that my nature is incorrigible. Instead of making an apology for trying to blaze a sideways trail, I have merely been at the old game again: with the pleasant and paradoxical result that in comparison to this irrelevant preface, the substance it was designed to condone is almost relevant. I might as well have begun at the beginning, after all.

If I had, I should have said that I was sorry, but a lecture which I had firmly intended to be one on the Nature of Poetry had turned out to be a rather unor-

thodox speculation on the nature of Shakespeare's poetry. It was not exactly my fault: when my head is full of a certain kind of thoughts, I cannot turn them out to make room for others. You know the Latin line:

'*Naturam expellas furca: tamen usque recurret.*'

'You may heave nature out with a pitchfork, but she'll be in again before you can say "knife." ' Not otherwise with me; and I feel that if I had offered to lecture on Keats, or Reparations, or the Fascist movement, it would have turned out to be the same old thing. Shakespeare would have been the burden of my song.

So that, compared to the enormity I might have committed, mine will be a venial offence. For, after all, Shakespeare is simply the greatest of all poets: and if it turns out that I have anything of import to say about the nature of his poetry, I shall in fact have said it about the nature of poetry in general.

In a recent book of critical studies, Sir Henry Newbolt, casting about for the emotional cause of poetry, and the cause of its emotional effect upon ourselves, discovered it in the poet's longing and our own for 'a land of heart's desire.' Although we may at first feel that this conception is as romantic as its phrasing, yet if we have an eye to the reality beneath the words, and consider how much of memorable poetry seems to have been inspired by a longing for the things that are not, we may finally be surprised at the scope of Sir Henry's conjecture. Shelley was made

for it, of course. What does Keats find in his Nightingale and his Grecian Urn but a voice and a symbol of a more perfect condition, far away from this world of time, 'Here where men sit and hear each other groan?' Wordsworth fits it well, with his—

> Blank misgivings of a creature
> Moving about in worlds not realised.

And so, in our day, does Walter de la Mare, dreaming of the shadowless asphodel of a kingdom where neither moth nor mortality doth corrupt. But even poets much less averse than these to accepting their fate as sons of earth reveal in their songs a longing for the things that are not. Catullus's '*Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus*,' —'My Lesbia, let us live and love'—was once perhaps a poem of triumphant love, and it may be only our knowledge of the bitter sequel which makes us read it as a pathetic prayer for security in a passion where no security is. But we do read it so. Love poets are but seldom the singers of happiness in love; and one of the greatest love-poets of our own times, Thomas Hardy, has given an expression that is immortal to the intolerable anguish of desiderium.

With some good show of reason we may say, therefore, that the characteristic emotion of poetry is a longing for the things that are not, for permanence amid change, for security in unrest—'this evermore unrest,' as Shakespeare called it—for eternity amid mortality. And this

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emotion is not peculiar to the romantic modern soul; it exists in classical poetry as well as in our own. It is in Homer, it is in Virgil, in Æschylus and Euripides and Theocritus; and nearer poets have perhaps done no more than make the longing more conscious and give it a more definitely subjective expression. 'Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art!' is only a more personal statement of a theme that is truly secular to poetry. It seems to have been more natural to the poets of old to voice their longings through the creatures of a created world. So that Aristotle, looking upon their practice, could define poetry in terms that seem to us strange, as an 'imitation of emotions and actions.' At first there seems to be an unbridgeable chasm between this definition and Sir Henry Newbolt's description; but the gulf narrows the more steadily we look into it. The Greek saw chiefly the thing that is made; the modern sees chiefly the temper that goes to making it. And the gulf is bridged altogether by that English thinker who stands midway between the old world and the new. The Poet, says Francis Bacon, 'submits the shows of things to the desires of the mind'; and again, 'the use of poetry hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it.'

The one of Bacon's sentences explains the fascination which poetry exerts upon us; the other describes the poet's activity. The poet does not merely give utterance to a desire for the things that are not, 'he submits the shadows

of things' to that desire. There is implicit in the brief sentence a precious distinction between the methods, and perhaps between the values, of lyrical and dramatic poetry, which is more often felt than formulated. And perhaps something more valuable still is concealed within it. Granted that we feel there is in Bacon's phrase a peculiar appropriateness to our own instinctive surmise of the nature of poetry, suppose we were to attempt to apply it. We should distinguish between the poetry of Shakespeare and Shelley somewhat after this manner. Shakespeare far more than Shelley, actually does submit the shadows of things to the desires of the mind. There is an objectivity, a substantiality, in Shakespeare that Shelley did not achieve. And again, while we are conscious in both of 'the desire of the mind,' in Shelley it appears much more as a desire perpetually unsatisfied, even as a desire by nature incapable of any satisfaction, 'the desire of the moth for the star.' We realise the difference most clearly if we consider the one sole poem in which Shakespeare's inspiration seems strangely akin to Shelley's. *The Phœnix and the Turtle* is platonic and mystical; it can be compared to Shelley's *Sensitive Plant*. The only reason why we do not think immediately of Shelley when we read it is that, in spite of all apparent similarity of conception, the quality of Shakespeare's poem is absolutely different from that of anything Shelley wrote. Shakespeare is secure and serene; in his poem we can detect no tremor of the agitation by which Shelley is incessantly disturbed. *The Phœnix and the Turtle* is mysterious, but it is crystal-clear.

We can express the difference only by saying that what Shelley longed for, Shakespeare at that moment possessed.

It would not be easy to say with confidence what *The Phœnix and the Turtle* is *about*. On the face of it, it is a requiem over the death of a phœnix and a turtle-dove, who are the symbols of a love made perfect by refinement from all earthly passion and become virginal. There is surely no more astonishing description of the highest attainable by human love.

> Hearts remote, yet not asunder;
> Distance, and no space was seen
> 'Twixt the turtle and his queen.
> But in them, it were a wonder.

But the poem floats high above the plane of intellectual apprehension: what we understand is only a poor simulacrum of what we feel—feel with some element of our being which chafes in silence against the bars of sense. And in the poet's own imagination it is Reason itself which makes and chants the dirge, Reason baffled by the sight of perfect individuality in perfect union.

> Reason, in itself confounded,
> Saw division grow together,
> To themselves yet either neither,
> Simple were so well compounded.

That it cried: How true a twain
Seemeth this concordant one!
Love hath reason, reason none
If what parts can so remain.

Whereupon it made this threne
To the phœnix and the dove,
Co-supremes and stars of love,
As chorus to their tragic scene.

Beauty, truth and rarity,
Grace in all simplicity,
Here enclosed in cinders lie.

Death is now the phœnix' nest;
And the turtle's loyal breast
To eternity doth rest,

Leaving no posterity:
'Twas not their infirmity,
It was married chastity.

Truth may seem, but cannot be;
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she;
Truth and beauty buried be.

To this urn let those repair
That are either true or fair;
For these dead birds sigh a prayer.

And we feel, in some inexplicable sense, that the poet's claim that Reason bows its head in this poem is a true one. There is an absolute harmony in *The Phœnix and the Turtle* which can easily appear to our heightened awareness as the necessary gesture of Reason's deliberate homage to a higher power. Through it we have a glimpse of a mode of experience wholly beyond our own, and touch the finality of a consummation. This veritably, we might say if we had the courage of our imaginations, *is* the music of the spheres: this is indeed the hymn of that celestial love which 'moves the sun and the other stars.'

For reasons which evade expression in ordinary speech, *The Phœnix and the Turtle* is the most perfect short poem in any language. It is *pure* poetry in the loftiest and most abstract meaning of the words: that is to say, it gives us the highest experience which it is possible for poetry to give, and it gives it without intermission. Here for once, it seems, Shakespeare had direct command over an essential source of inspiration; here he surrendered himself completely to a kind of experience, and to the task of communicating a kind of experience, which elsewhere he conveys to us only through 'the shadows of things'; for a moment he reveals himself as an inhabitant of a strange kingdom wherein he moves serene and with mastery. Beside the unearthly purity, the unfaltering calm of this poem, even the most wonderful poetry of his dramas can sometimes appear to us as 'stained with mortality.' This is the harmony of which broken and tumultuous echoes accompany the destinies of his heroes;

this is the knowledge of which the memory haunted Macbeth—or Macbeth's creator—when he cried:

> She should have died hereafter.
> To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more; it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

There speaks a despair beyond Macbeth's; it comes like a moan of wild and superhuman music into the play, a divine visitation. It is a despair beyond Macbeth's, for it is not the despair of crime, but of mortality; not of a murderer, but a victim; and it could have come even more truly from the greatest and noblest spirit in the world.

There is a potent reason, therefore, other than our own instinct, for regarding these lines of Macbeth's as expressing with a peculiar intimacy Shakespeare's own thought and emotion. They overcharge the play, and are too powerful for the character or the situation to bear; they do not contain the mood or the thought or the vision of thwarted ambition or detected murder; they do not

belong to Macbeth, therefore we must believe that they do belong to Shakespeare. And we have an exactly similar sense of emotional disproportion when we read the no less famous passage from *The Tempest*:

> And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And like an unsubstantial pageant faded
> Leave not a wrack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.—Sir, I am vexed;
> Bear with my weakness: my old brain is troubled.

As in *Macbeth*, it is the sheer magnificance of the lines alone which prevents us from seeing them as dramatically inappropriate. We feel, and perhaps rightly feel, that poetry so splendid can never be wrong. After all, if an archangel should interpose in a mortal argument, we should scarcely charge him with irrelevance. Nevertheless, these lines of Prospero's are dramatically irrelevant. They are unexpected and unprepared for[1]; and in order to value them at their true worth we must allow full weight to the fact that Shakespeare quite deliberately represents Prospero's vision of the unsubstantiality of the world as due to a disturbance of his mind. Prospero has had a sudden fit of anger against Caliban. Ferdinand, looking upon him, sees vaguely that 'some passion works

[1] And, with all deference to Mr. A. C. Bradley, unexplained.

him strongly'; Miranda, who knows her father better, declares that:

> Never till this day
> Saw I him touched with anger so distempered.

But she is mistaken. There is no anger in the vision; it is resigned and serene, yet with the suddenness of a flash of piercing insight and all the tumultuous agitation of 'a beating mind.' Even more definitely than before we have a warrant for regarding these lines as belonging more nearly to Shakespeare himself than to the character who speaks them.

The lines from *The Tempest* are strangely similar to those from *Macbeth*: similar first in that both alike belong to what we may call the 'superhuman' poetry of Shakespeare, of which the effect so greatly eludes our analysis and the felt meaning so far exceeds the meaning understood, that in order to describe it at all we are driven even against our will into semi-mystical metaphor; and still more strikingly similar in that the sentiment in both passages is almost the same. In both the poet suddenly sees the insignificance of human life and cries,

> There's nothing serious in mortality.

But there is a difference between them. Whereas in *Macbeth* he is angry, embittered, indignant and contemptuous, and speaks with the gall of a man writhing with

self-loathing for having been the victim of a long deception, in *The Tempest* the voice is quiet with resignation. Between the two kindred passages there is the great gulf which lies between rebellion and acceptance.

Let us leave these clues for a moment, to turn to another kind of passages in Shakespeare's poetry which constantly exert the same hyper-dramatic power; passages in which he seems most constantly to be impelled by some force of his nature to express thoughts and feelings beyond those which the dramatic situation demands. No poet in the world has dealt so vividly, so lovingly, and so strangely with death as Shakespeare. It is, of course, inevitable that any tragic poet should be largely concerned with death; yet Shakespeare's reaction to the thought of death seems to be wholly different from that of any other tragic poet; it is a reaction quite peculiar to himself, and so evidently beyond his conscious control that it appears with the same elemental force in an attempt at comedy like *Measure for Measure* as in the tragedies proper. Claudio betrays, at the prospect of death, the same queer mixture of horror and fascination as Hamlet himself. Shakespeare, we may say, longs for *finality* in death; and he passes from a condition of doubt to a condition of assurance of that finality. As he grows surer, death becomes to him more and more a triumph over life, not at all, or to be accurate, not at all obviously, in the Christian sense of '*mors janua vitæ*,' because 'death is the gate of life'; but by virtue of its mere cessation: it has for him a meaning of which an echo has escaped into Sir Walter Raleigh's phrase: 'O eloquent, just,

and mighty death!' The thought of death as a period to mortality fills him with an exultation which finds its most characteristic utterance in Cleopatra's

> It is great
> To do that thing which ends all other deeds,
> Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,
> Which sleeps and never palates more the dug,
> The beggar's nurse and Cæsar's.

And from Shakespeare's middle period onwards the imagination of the death-bed as the marriage-bed continually recurs. Man, the bridegroom, 'will encounter darkness as a bride.' 'I will be,' says Antony,

> A bridegroom in my death, and run into't
> As to a lover's bed.

'The stroke of death,' says Cleopatra, 'is as a lover's pinch That hurts and is desired.' And to those who object that we are imputing to Shakespeare himself sentiments which belong to the characters of his drama we shall reply that the fact that these sentiments invariably surge up through the smallest chink of opportunity proves that they are due not to the exigencies of the creation, but to the habit of mind of the creator; and we shall also reply that when, as at the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare's obvious effort was to lift his characters up to a pinnacle of truth and nobility, these were the thoughts

and feelings with which he naturally endowed them: and further, that those passages of his poetry which awaken the deepest and most disturbing echoes we are compelled by an instinct to reckon peculiarly his own.

The strange thing about these characteristic utterances of Shakespeare is their compulsive power. We may ascribe this to their extreme beauty: but that is only to solve a mystery by a word, and we are left with the same question in another form: 'Why are these utterances so mysteriously beautiful?' A vision of the insignificance of this life may indeed be the occasion of beautiful poetry; but the poetry we expect from it is sombre and sad. These utterances of Shakespeare are neither the one nor the other. Even when, as in *Macbeth*, there is anger and contempt in the rejection of life, there is exaltation also: we are not cast down, but uplifted by them. It is hard to translate a feeling so mysterious into words without playing it false, but we might attempt to render our reaction to these passages of Shakespeare by saying that we feel that his rejection, even when angry and indignant, is not negative but positive: he rejects this life because he knows of something better and truer, even though the knowledge be against his will. When he has pronounced that life is 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing,' he is not left, as other men would be, naked to the cold wind of eternity. He has some secret knowledge of which he cannot be dispossessed, and of which he cannot dispossess himself; he has a memory of some kind of experience beside which the actual experi-

ence of life is indeed trivial. He had been too deeply in love with life to deny it easily, and he was condemned—throughout what is called his 'tragic period'—to hover between rejection and acceptance of an experience which transcended it. It is true that he is, in a sense, the most human of all our poets; but he is also the strangest: and it is a mistake in proportion to minimise the strangeness and exaggerate the ordinary in him.

What, then, if we were to resign ourselves to a mysterious explanation of what is mysterious, and to suppose that Shakespeare had access to a plane of experience beyond our own, and that he had apprehended as realities a truth, a harmony and a love—apprehended them as one and not as three—which are not to be found on earth, and are not to be fully expressed in terms of earthly happenings? This apprehension in all its purity we should regard as fixed in *The Phœnix and the Turtle*, where it appears (for causes which we may look for, if we will, in what little we know of Shakespeare's life) as a symbolic vision of perfect and celestial love, through which 'the white radiance of eternity' shines without spot. By what stress of soul Shakespeare attained to this experience we do not know: we can only guess. But after this experience, which was valid only so long as it lasted, he was bewildered. Having seen something beyond the world, he was bewildered in the world. We can explain the preoccupation with death which entered into his work with the plays of the *Hamlet* period—*Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* followed immediately

after *The Phœnix and the Turtle*—and we can explain the apparent cynicism with which they are pervaded by appealing to the actual experience which is recorded in the Sonnets: what we cannot explain in such terms is the strange quality of this preoccupation with death, the sudden extension of his poetic range, and his production of effects which we most naturally describe as superhuman: his command, let us say, of a new majestic and unearthly music. From this time onward Shakespeare rejects life; and he never accepts it again. It is true that there is something which is often described as 'serenity' in his latest romantic plays, culminating in *The Tempest*, but to insist on this quality, indeed to describe it by such a word, is to exaggerate it and to distort the total effect of Shakespeare's work. For the 'serenity' of the final period is not of the same order as the tumult and despair of the great tragedies. The acceptance that is in them is not an acceptance of life; it is something quite different, it is an acceptance of his own rejection of life. He is no longer rebellious against the discrepancy, the utter hostility between the thing he knows and the thing which is. He has tried to reconcile them. Shakespeare's tragedies are essentially nothing but the repeated attempt to express his knowledge in terms of this world; that is why they are terrible and moving as no other tragedies, not even the greatest, have been. We feel within them an overstraining of the human soul. Not for nothing does madness and hallucination count for so much in their structure. Shakespeare is torn asunder by the effort to express a

perception which is not of this world in terms or events and characters which are. They derive their mysterious potency from the double tragedy of which they are the record: the tragedy of the characters, and the tragedy of Shakespeare who invented them in vain—in vain, not for our purposes, but for his own intentions. And, in spite of the magnificent triumphs he was to achieve, in spite of the incomparable victory which is represented by *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra* in the kingdom of art, Shakespeare's great tragic period ends in failure for himself. He has attempted the impossible; he has come nearer to achieving it than any other human being we know. But the impossible remains the impossible, and Shakespeare fails.

Perhaps you will understand from this brief indication what I mean when I say that the so-called 'serenity' of the final period is not of the same order as the tumult and despair of the tragedies. The acceptance that is in them is not an acceptance of human destinies, but of the fact that human destinies are incommensurable with the experience that is beyond them. There is a tremendous difference: all the difference between winning a victory and accepting the necessity of defeat. *The Tempest* is no answer to *Macbeth* or *King Lear*; it is rather a turning aside from, an avoidance of, their problems, a giving up of the attempt at victory. And, as we have seen, the most moving passage of *The Tempest* stands clean outside the dramatic argument, and is the most personal and the most resigned of all Shakespeare's many variations on the theme:

'There's nothing serious in mortality.' What is, I believe, of far more moment in Shakespeare's final period than any apparent 'serenity,' is, first, his general listlessness, his manifest lack of interest in what he was writing, and, second, his constant awakening out of this indifference to portray an ideal of youthful love, of youth itself, which fascinates him. His Perdita, his Marina, his Miranda, his Florizel, his Imogen, represent something more than a new fashion in romance. I should say that their creator was trying to embody in these youthful lovers, striving to make real to himself, an imagination that a new race of beings might be born for whom the knowledge and the love expressed in *The Phœnix and the Turtle* might be not a metaphysical but an actual and lived reality. They represent a final attempt to solve the problem by conceiving a generation for whose consciousness the problem shall no longer exist.

The beginning of the *Hamlet* period, I have said, marks Shakespeare's rejection of life. This rejection of life is maintained to the end; it is voiced by Prospero at the last as well as Hamlet or Macbeth or Cleopatra, and in language as compulsive as theirs. What governs the subtle and various modulations of mood which so deeply colour Shakespeare's plays when the early period of confidence is past is not the attitude of rejection itself, but the varying emotion with which the attitude is held. In the *Hamlet* plays, the emotion is bewilderment, as it were, at the absolute incompatibility, the sheer hostility between one life, one mode of experience, and the other, and at

Shakespeare's knowledge that he himself belonged to both. On the one side, the perfect, virginal and suprasensual love of *The Phœnix and the Turtle*, on the other the sheer luxuriance of the sensual riot in *Measure for Measure*. In *Hamlet*, the crimes and disgusts of this world tearing to pieces a soul whose affinity is with the other. In *Macbeth* the emotion is blank and deadly despair, 'irrecoverably dark, total eclipse,' but the despair is thrilled and made more dark by tremors of another experience. *Macbeth* is Satanic; the work of a Lucifer who has 'seen some majesty' and is tortured by the memory of it. A black ninth wave of loathing for human destinies surges through the play. In *King Lear*, tremendous and awful tragedy though it is, the black despair is lightened. In no other play is the purely superhuman note more miraculously sounded; and it is surely no accident that Shakespeare uttered it through the lips of 'a foolish, fond old man,' who wanders, driven by the malignant cruelty of evil, beyond the confines of reason. In this, one of the two greatest of Shakespeare's plays, we feel that he communicated more of his secret knowledge through human symbols than elsewhere in his work, and that he forced the capacities of the poetry which is 'an imitation of emotions and actions' to their breaking-point. Through the fury of the elements and the fiercer fury of evil souls we hear a divine music, an assurance of that which can be only by virtue of the forces which seem to deny it. As far as we can assign a spirit which shines through the whole of *King Lear* to any particular part of it, it seems

to radiate most intensely from the figure of Cordelia. The angry and gusty fire of Kent's loyalty burns in Cordelia to a pure essential flame, the utmost sublunary destinies can carry of the more perfect fidelity which Shakespeare had apprehended. In the final act, and by reason of the mutual disaster which is to engulf them, Lear and Cordelia are lifted up into the condition of *The Phœnix and the Turtle*. Lear's very words: 'We two will sing alone like birds i' the cage,' contain a trembling mortal echo of their song, and Reason might chant over Cordelia the dirge it chanted over them:

> Beauty, truth and rarity,
> Grace in all simplicity,
> Here enclosed in cinders lie.
>
> Death is now the phœnix' nest,
> And the turtle's loyal breast
> To eternity doth rest.

Loyalty, I believe, became for Shakespeare more and more exclusively the earthly symbol of his highest experience. It seemed to him that this relation between human beings could express, with least distortion, an image of another relation that he knew; this relation, more than any other, seemed to vindicate the existence of some connection between the world of his apprehension and the world of human life. And the diffusion of the radiance of loyalty through *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra* sets

these two plays apart as the pinnacle of his *expression* in literature. They mark his greatest triumph as an artist, for the artist is the man who communicates his intuitions of an ultimate reality, intuitions which have in themselves no shape or form or likeness, through symbols chosen in the world of common experience: he clothes his knowledge in the garment of invention. *Antony and Cleopatra* is Shakespeare's triumph as the artist. Waste after waste in *Antony and Cleopatra* finds its justification, is somehow redeemed and explained, by loyalty after loyalty. Enobarbus, Eros, Antony, the great Queen herself, Charmian and Iras, one after another make the sacrifice, as though all the fidelity of which the human spirit had ever been capable were crowded in a magnificent crescendo into this single story. In no other work of literature that I know does the spectacle of constant disaster make me conscious of such a profundity of calm; and in no other play of Shakespeare's is death so constantly presented as a sweet and longed-for sleep. Hamlet's torturing thought of the dreams that may trouble the sleep of death returns no more; there is no railing against life, like Macbeth's, but a tranquil acceptance of its end. The two great characters speak in instinctive harmony at their taking-off. Antony's

> Unarm, Eros, the long day's task is done
> And we must sleep—

And Cleopatra's

> Dost thou not see my baby at my breast
> That sucks the nurse asleep?

chime together on the full note of the play, and it is there so amply sounded that even Prospero's words, for all their beauty, are no more than a twilight echo of a midday plenitude.

In so far as we may speak at all of problems and solutions in Shakespeare's mind, it is not *The Tempest* which resolves the knots of the tragedies, but rather *Antony and Cleopatra*, for *Antony and Cleopatra* does seem to answer questions of the real world, as it were, in terms of the real world: which *The Tempest* does not. And yet, of course, this answer is no answer. Loyalty and sacrifice, suffering and disaster and death, may indeed be the conditions under which the human spirit comes nearest to manifesting its kinship with a more mysterious reality; but it remains the old paradox which has haunted men through a whole epoch of the world's consciousness. Ever since Christ came on earth, speaking strange words, the greatest human minds have moved in obedience to their rhythm. True life can only be won by the sacrifice of life—'He that loseth his life shall save it.' The appointed end of a perfect human love is death. 'Greater love hath no *man* than this that he lay down his life for a friend.' And Christ's own crucifixion is the archetype of all Shakespeare's tragedy. The purest reality, the purest beauty, the purest love, cannot, by its own nature, manifest itself here on earth without disaster; but in disaster it can. Just as

Christ's earthly defeat is His triumph, so the death of Cordelia and Cleopatra is their victory. The paradox remains, but it is a paradox which, in some secret chamber of our being, we understand.

I hate, in speaking of Shakespeare, to talk of problems and solutions. You cannot apprehend a living mind by such rigid methods. But we have to expect that our vocabulary should be weak and uncertain and approximate when we are dealing with suprasensual things. We have to reconcile ourselves to the knowledge that in whatever terms we talk of the essential Shakespeare, we shall

> Do it wrong, being so majestical
> To offer it the show of violence.

But, indeed, instead of talking of problems and solutions, it would be nearer the truth to say that *King Lear* and, even more immediately, *Antony and Cleopatra*, themselves compose the tumults they awaken. The security of a purer experience illuminates and calms the riot of mortal issues. In them the magic of Shakespeare's poetry touches its zenith, being constantly quickened by an apprehension of a reality which transcends and informs it—a mysterious effect of surpassing genius by which the characters seem ultimately to be governed in their act by the beauty which is manifested in their speech: their lips at last merely utter the cadence of their deeds. When 'the god Hercules whom Antony loved' forsakes him to the sound of

music under the earth, a more potent music enters into possession of his soul and leads him unerring to his destiny.

Than this achievement poetry can go no higher. For remember, the word of Aristotle, though it is not the whole truth, is true. Poetry is 'an imitation of emotions and actions.' Only because it is that can it make its universal and permanent appeal. The world of the poet must be a continuation of the world of ordinary human experience. But that is not all. Poetry is also 'a submission of the shows of things to the desires of the mind.' This 'imitation of emotions and actions' is only a means by which the profounder intuitions of the poet can be realised and made communicable. And in this description of Shakespeare which I have attempted, I have tried to show how, in the greatest of all poets, this twofold process was accomplished.

Moreover, I believe, and perhaps you will have gathered why I believe it, that precisely because Shakespeare was the greatest of all poets, he accepted his own essential and inevitable failure. Because his intuition into reality was deepest, his was the deepest consciousness of the impossibility of ever fully and truly manifesting it through 'the imitation of emotions and actions.' No man has ever done that; if ever it can be done, the world and the human mind will be changed. And this, and nothing else, I believe, is what Shakespeare is saying when he has given up the struggle with the impossible. His Perdita, his Miranda, his Marina, these new-born creatures who look on the world with a new vision and cry, like Miranda,

O brave new world
That has such creatures in it!

are merely the form of speech with which the great poet utters the truth of the great prophet: 'Except ye be born again ye can in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.' And, further, I believe that it was because Shakespeare also had, by his own way, attained to that knowledge that he cared not at all what happened to his great work, and it was left to the pious offices of two fellow actors to save the most magnificent poetry of the world from oblivion.

Poetry is relative; but the intuition and the knowledge from which poetry is born is absolute. And there is no reconciling them; the greatest poetry is a compromise. And Shakespeare had reached a point where compromise and the effort of compromise had no more interest for him. He was, in a sense, the ideal poet, and he reached an ideal conclusion: the more we understand him, the more we can understand the essential laws of poetic genius, and the nature of poetry itself.

Poetry, I have said, is relative: in order to be universal and comprehensible it must be. But there is a poetry that may almost be called absolute. *The Phœnix and the Turtle* belongs to this kind of poetry. It is the direct embodiment, through symbols which are necessarily dark, of a pure, comprehensive and self-satisfying experience, which we may call, if we please, an immediate intuition into the hidden nature of things. It is inevitable that such poetry

should be obscure, mystical, and strictly unintelligible: it is too abstract for our comprehension, too essential, too little mediated. There is not much poetry of this kind; because it is too personal and too esoteric to gain the general ear. And it necessarily hovers between the condition of being the highest poetry of all and not being poetry at all. But, wherever in the scale we place it, it gives us a clue to the nature of poetry itself. For relative poetry—which is practically the whole of what we call poetry—is born of the adjustment of the human soul to the knowledge and memory of such an experience. It comes of the effort to communicate this knowledge through a world of symbols; and the highest among this relative poetry is that in which the symbols chosen from the world of our human experience are most completely saturated with the quality of this intuition.

I do not mean that all poets conform to the type of Shakespeare: after all, he is too great to be used as a standard. A smaller poet may have neither the power of direct intuition, not the genius to create a whole world through which to express it. He may be chained to the world of the particular; certain things may move him strangely, and the emotion they arouse in him may pour over into his description of them. Then they also become symbols of an intuition which sees beyond the object into a deeper reality. What I say is this: that, although, speaking strictly, there is no poet like Shakespeare, to every true poet, whether great or small, the process which was so tremendously exemplified in Shakespeare *must* occur

in some degree. You must not hope to find in all poets the same terribly complex process of adjustment: in Keats, who was a great poet, it is ever so much simpler to understand: in Wordsworth, the whole movement of his mind is almost transparent. In smaller poets, if they are *true* poets, the effort of understanding their rhythm and scope is simpler still. But these all belong essentially to the same kind of men, and their poetry to the same kind of poetry. Shakespeare is only the greatest and most mysterious of all. If we understand him, we can understand all poetry. And I feel that it was at any rate a right instinct which impelled me to devote this lecture to a consideration of him alone. The nature of Shakespeare's poetry is the nature of poetry. I wonder whether I have persuaded you that this is so.

[*September*, 1922.]

THE CREATION OF FALSTAFF

THE CREATION OF FALSTAFF

When we are confronted with the work of a great writer our first impulse is one to complete acceptance and surrender. We accept the miraculous gift which the author in his bounty places in our hands; we surrender ourselves utterly into his keeping. It is as though we stood before the gate, and he spoke the Open Sesame. The doors swing wide, and we enter a strange new-minted world, shining bright or sombre gleaming, of which the great writer is the sole emperor, through which he alone can guide us, in which we can only wonder and rejoice. We may be sad, we may be happy, while we wander behind him, but our sadness and our happiness are not of this world; for we are, when the door closes upon us once again, sad that we could have been so happy, and happy that we could have been so sad.

And this suffices many. Indeed it is sufficient. This, and nothing other, is what the writer has to give: he makes us free of a new kingdom of the soul. We accept his gift and rejoice.

But, in every truth, a miracle has been worked upon us. We cannot help it; we ponder this thing in our hearts. We begin to see that this kingdom of the soul which has been opened to us, must be also a kingdom of our own souls, otherwise we should never have recognised it or known it for what it was. The great writer vindicates our right to our own forgotten majesty and disturbs us with memories of the splendours of our own deep-buried

past. He puts before us something far greater, far meaner, far darker, far brighter, than we ourselves are, and we accept it. We accept it, because we know—more than know—because we *feel* it is true. This character, so different from our waking selves, so infinitely more heroic, or more earthy, than we (it seems) ever have been or can ever be, is approved by us. Long silent voices arise from within us and salute it: 'This is true!'

How do we know, in virtue of what faculty do we feel, that 'This is true?' And the answer is, I believe, that we are in fact far greater than we know, and far more mysterious than, in this strange life in which we have encased and imprisoned ourselves, we can suffer to admit ourselves to be. Our roots strike deeper into the darkness, and our flowers rise more splendid into the light than we dare to acknowledge. Darkness is not more terrible than light; the extreme uplifting of which the human soul is capable terrifies no less than the warm gloom of chaos whence it sprung and to which, in its mightiest moments, it must return. We turn away from the blinding poles. Does not light blind as well as darkness? But at moments we are visited by gleams and whispers which we acknowledge, not knowing what we do. Under the compulsion of a great writer chiefly, we confess what we are.

Then, in our pondering, comes the further question: What manner of man is this who works these spells upon us, who can turn our faces to the darkness from which we rose and to which we must descend, and to the light towards which we soar and from which we must fall, who

brings down gleams and calls up whispers which are new and old and familiar and strange, so that, having heard them, we are like the wakened lovers of John Donne, who return from the darkness wherein they have plunged to the limbo-light in which we live, the twilight-mist in which we seek our safety, the dim draping with which we envelop the world in order to call it real. Like Donne's lovers, we say:

> And now, good-morrow to our waking souls
> Which watch not one another out of fear.

Fear of the deeps, fear of the heights, between which human life is perilously swung; fear of the great downward thrust of the root, fear of the great upward surge of the bursting flower. Fear, and a secret thrill of the triumph we glimpse but never shall achieve; fear, and a secret pulse of expectation we shall never justify. What manner of man is this who works this magic, black magic and white, upon our souls?

> What is your substance, whereof are you made
> That millions of strange shadows on you tend?

And the answer is: Of what the great writer makes us aware, of that he is. As he, in the strange rediscovery of life which is his mission and his privilege, plunges down and rises up, renewed in darkness and renewed in light, we are down-plunged and uplifted with him. The more we

know of where he has taken *us*, the more we know of where *he* himself has been; the more we are aware, by his mysterious potency, of what we are, the more we are aware of what he is.

The writer creates out of his deepest experience. Deep, deep it *must* go, if his work is to outlast the ages, for by his power of reawakening deep experience in us, alone he lives. The bounds of the twilight world we call the real change with the centuries, even with the years, but the depths below and the heights above remain for ever. And the height a man can compass depends upon the depth to which he can descend.

It is no use blinking the fact of Shakespeare. If we know, as we do, in our bones and bowels, that he was great, then we must know him, and in order to know him we must submit ourselves to him. We must accept him wholly; we must not smile on this part and turn away from that. If we try to accept the light and refuse the darkness, we shall end by not even understanding the light, for it is conditioned and made possible and given its own peculiar quality by the darkness.

Before we can approach the problem of the creation of Falstaff, we must have a notion of the process in which the problem has its place; in order to understand what Falstaff meant for Shakespeare, we must have some sense of the motion of his mind and being. Not that we can ever regard Shakespeare as it were an abstract potency swinging free of all human limitation. What he was was severely and strictly conditioned. Nevertheless, he was

what he was: and that was something more than a member and a shareholder of a company of Elizabethan actors, and a maker of stage plays for his fellows. He was one of the very greatest souls in human history. We know nothing about him — for practical purposes, nothing. When he was born — and that not certainly — when he died, a few traditions. For my own part, I neither expect nor desire to know more. What he could and would tell the world, he told. There are his works: there is the man.

A man, then, born with great and glorious gifts of speech and fancy: overbrimming with them, abounding, luxuriant and rich; finding life as generous as himself, enchanted by the wonder of living and writing and being, splendidly sensuous, delicately understanding. It seems that no man was ever so gloriously fitted for the life into which he was born as Shakespeare. He needed to deny nothing: in his eyes everything had its own indefeasible right to existence, bore its own unique and authentic bloom. He could do nothing wrong, because nothing was wrong: it was, therefore it was good. A tragedy? Why, yes, of course he could write tragedy: he could write anything. But *Romeo and Juliet* is not a tragedy after all: it is only a magical love lyric, more substantial and more real than any in our language save only Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*. And *Richard II*? That is sad, but sad only with the sadness of its most beautiful line:

> And tell sad stories of the death of kings.

Nothing to grind the heart or stab the soul. At worst

something for a wry smile or a tear that is a pleasant relief from happiness.

No, truly, it was a golden world into which Shakespeare was born, a golden man to delight in it. There was a soft and steady sunshine upon everything.

Then, something happened. What it was, we do not know. At least, in the manner of our speech, we say we do not know. But by that we mean only that we do not know the event, the outward visible happening that would make a headline in the newspapers or a nine days' scandal for the gossips of the town. But what, in heaven's name, does it matter whether we know this or not? Could we, by knowing it, know one single jot or tittle more about the living soul of the man who suffered the discomfiture? They write books about Shakespeare the man, they hunt out for him hypothetical mistresses, they claim to tell us what the Sonnets mean in terms of outward events—as if by this blind raking in obscurity they could discover something. They scarcely pause to remember that, the greater a man is, the more completely is an event merged in his inward reaction to the event. Not what happens to, but what happens *in* him, is the subject for our care: not what he suffers, but what he becomes. We cannot help our human curiosity; it is not a bad thing. It has its root in common human sympathy and flowers in the desire to make the great man as familiar as our neighbour. But these trivial searches so easily lead us to forget that the road of knowledge lies elsewhere and is as open as the day. Any one who cares to may know far more about Shakespeare than

he can about his nearest and dearest friend. He can know the very notion of Shakespeare's mind, the very pulse of his being.

Something may or may not have happened *to* Shakespeare; but something happened in him. Suddenly the world that was rich and single and golden became bitter and double and dark. It was rent asunder. On the one hand, darkness and loathing, on the other, a blinding light and an anguished longing. Ineffable darkness and ineffable light. Read Claudio's speech to Isabella in *Measure for Measure*.

> Aye, but to die and go we know not where;
> To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
> This sensible warm motion to become
> A kneaded clod, and the delighted spirit
> To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
> In thrilling region of thick-ribbèd ice;
> To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
> And blown with restless violence round about
> The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
> Of those that lawless and incertain thought
> Imagines howling: —'Tis too horrible.

And read beside it *The Phœnix and the Turtle*, the most miraculous poem of unearthly love we have, —the voice of the consummation when spirit has winged its way free of all the mud of earth, and passion has become virginal once more.

On the other hand the whole atmosphere of *Measure*

for Measure is heavy with disgusted sensuality, and the same oppression (or the same obsession) is in *Hamlet*. Yet these are all the works of a single period. Disruption has come, and out of what was single, the spiritual and the animal have resolved themselves—the incessant strife of the ideal and the actual has begun, the struggle which was to carry Shakespeare through *Macbeth* and *Lear* to *Antony and Cleopatra*, and, if not to a final serenity, to the mysterious alliance between a belief that life is illusion and a dreaming faith in a generation yet unborn for whom this vision and this conflict should no longer be. For *The Tempest* is, as it were, a crystal in which Shakespeare shows us a universe ordered anew—another harmony, another wholeness, a reuniting of the divided parts. In the words of Virgil's Messianic eclogue:

> Magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo;
> Jam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.

The movement of Shakespeare's mind to this conclusion, the incessant forward-swinging from ideal to real, from darkness to light and back again, including ever more of the totality of human experience in its ambit, and at last the brightness of the light become dazzling by virtue of the depth of darkness to which it is opposed—the story of this movement is one upon which I cannot enter here. What I have said is nothing more than the roughest sketch of the curve of Shakespeare's progress, in order to make clear the position which this question of Falstaff holds in the whole problem of Shakespeare.

THE CREATION OF FALSTAFF

Falstaff is the greatest creation of the yet undivided being of Shakespeare. He is the creature of Shakespeare's golden prime, of his first maturity; he is, in a sense, the symbol of Shakespeare's natural attitude, the spontaneous fruit of his uninterrupted growth. Or rather, I should say he is this in essence and by intention; actually, as I shall try to show, he is something different. He is conditioned and maimed and stunted.

I cannot *prove* my contention; I may hope to convince you of it, but that is all. The facts in an inquiry such as this are not of an order that admits of proof. They are not, and cannot be made, objects for scientific scrutiny. The facts are four plays: the two parts of *Henry IV*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Henry V*. There is, no doubt, a sense in which these can be made objects for scientific scrutiny. You can measure the lines, compute the number of weak endings and of strong, establish the proportion of prose to verse; or you can examine them as though they were logical demonstrations, find out the missing steps, the inconsistencies, the non-sequiturs; or you can calculate how much actual time is consumed by the action or pre-supposed by it. All these things have been done, and they will probably be done over again, many times. They are nearly all irrelevant. For, in this order to things—this pre-eminently spiritual order—the fact of a play is not so many lines of printed words, but our reaction to them.

Once granted that the facts with which we have to deal are our reactions, the next thing is to discriminate

among our reactions. Our natural inclination is to regard Falstaff as a whole. He appears in the first part of *Henry IV*; he reappears in the second part; he reappears once more in *The Merry Wives*; and he dies in *Henry V*. Nothing could be simpler. Where is the problem? you may ask. And, indeed, if Falstaff is merely a name, nothing *could* be simpler, and the problem is not there. The name appears, reappears, disappears. *Actum est.*

But Falstaff is far more than a name: he is a character, he is the embodiment of a vision of life. And if we look more closely into the quality of his appearances and reappearances, we can see that he is not a whole, and that there is a problem. It comes to us first in these terms: Falstaff is completely alive in *Henry IV*, Part I; he is far less alive in Part II; he is something altogether different in *The Merry Wives;* and in *Henry V* he is dead.

Falstaff is completely alive in *Henry IV*, Part I. But we can say more than that. In that play, Falstaff is *primus inter pares;* he is the first and greatest, but he is the first and greatest among equals. Hotspur, being a character of history, with his fate appointed in the authorities, has to die: but if he could have been spared, he might have become another Falstaff for posterity. Of course, there could not be another Falstaff; but there could have been a rival to Falstaff—a character animated by a like fundamental irresponsibility; the antithesis of Falstaff, but his complement also; as careless in his pursuit of honour as Falstaff in his pursuit of sack. It is a curious relation that holds between the man who thought—

It were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon

and the other who said:

> 'Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is that word honour? What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it! He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible then? Yes, to the dead. But will it live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore, I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon; and so ends my catechism.'

But though it is a strange one, the relation between these two exists. It is not a relation that would have been recognised by either of them in daily life. Hotspur would have despised Falstaff; and Falstaff, when safely out of reach of his sword, would have laughed at Hotspur. It is a relation of another kind.

For Hotspur, like Falstaff, is a character of the first order; in sheer imaginative reality he runs the fat knight very close. He lives and moves and has his being. His scene with Lady Percy, his scene with Glendower, belong to the very highest manifestations of Shakespeare's creative power in his first unbroken period, when he seems to have been simply a force of nature in a sense in which

perhaps only Homer and Tolstoy and Dickens have been forces of nature expressing themselves through the written word. We feel that the first part of *Henry IV* is naturally balanced and harmonious. It plays within a single world of Shakespeare's imagination. Falstaff is one denizen of it, Hotspur another; they breathe the same air, the same sunlight shines upon them, and we feel that if our vision were delicate enough we could see how the one creation implied the other, for we have a sense of them as necessary projections of the same moment in the same mood of the same genius. And what is true of these two heroes of the play holds good of the play altogether. There is an astonishing interdependence of the parts; they are irradiated by a shining atmosphere of unity, which it would need much labour to define, for it is by nature almost beyond definition. But the word to describe it is, I suppose, 'lambent'; tongues of smiling flame play over everything. And the point at which we can most nearly capture the essence in a few lines is, perhaps, Prince Henry's casual remark:

> 'I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the North; he that kills me some six or seven dozen Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, "Fie upon this quiet life! I want work." "Oh, my sweet Harry," says she, "how many hast thou killed to-day?" "Give my roan horse a drench," says he, and answers, "Some fourteen," an hour after. "A trifle, a trifle." '

Intrinsically, it is perhaps not funnier than a dozen of the things that Falstaff says; but its effect in its place, following immediately upon the marvellous scene between Hotspur and his wife, is prodigious. This slant and smiling sunbeam, we feel, can be thrown upon anything. Hotspur throws it on the gentleman who came to demand his prisoners and on Glendower, Prince Harry on Hotspur, Falstaff on Prince Harry, and Shakespeare himself on the world.

But in the second part this magical condition—this champagne atmosphere—exists no longer. The second part contains, of course, many wonderful things, but this radiant naturalness is intermittent. Instead of being a play in which Falstaff is only a triumphant particular crystallisation of the general element, there is no general element at all—neither unity, nor atmosphere of unity. Against an irrelevant background of unsavoury history, Falstaff performs, and as often as not he has no heart at all in the performance. He is quite as often merely mechanical as he is inspired. This falling-off has been recognised by many; and condoned or excused or explained. It has been said, for instance, that between writing the first and the second parts of *Henry IV*, Shakespeare had come under the influence of Ben Jonson's inferior and mechanical conception of comedy. It is not likely on general grounds that a commanding genius, conscious of its powers, should be warped by the theories of a talent. To be influenced is one thing, to be inhibited is quite another. And as a matter of fact, it is precisely where the comedy

of *Henry IV*, Part II, is in setting and externals most Jonsonian, that Shakespeare first becomes himself again. The tavern scene, where Falstaff dines with Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet—a trick of name Shakespeare may very well have taken from Jonson—may offend our modern pretences of refinement; it is nevertheless superb—quite how superb we can only realise at the end, when it is plain that Shakespeare has achieved the miracle of carrying a thread of true sentiment clean through the scene without even a momentary discord.

And Falstaff is himself again in the scenes in which he is engaged in monstrously misusing the King's Press in Gloucestershire. It is when he is alone, with no other comic characters to bear him up, that it is most evident that the virtue has departed from him. His opening scene with the Lord Chief-Justice is a queer affair. Falstaff says some good things in the course of it: if it were taken away we should never know that he 'was born about three o'clock in the afternoon, with a white head and something a round belly'; and, certainly, we should never have guessed that he had lost his voice 'with hollaing and singing of anthems.' But for the most part the richness is departed. The fat knight's wit has become thin and verbal and boring: the stage-play is effective, but the substance of the talk is not. And when Falstaff plays the old, old comic trick of pretending not to hear the Lord Chief-Justice, we know that Shakespeare is getting through an uncongenial task by relying on his knowledge of stage technique. Falstaff never had to depend for his being upon

such props before; nor did he ever descend so low as in his reply to the Lord Chief-Justice's rebuke:

> CH.-JUST.: There is not a white hair on your face but should have his effect of gravity.
>
> FALS.: His effect of gravy, gravy, gravy.

Let us hope that that is a gag of the Elizabethan clown which has found its way into the text. There is nothing quite so imbecile as that in the scene.

On the whole, it is not too much to say that in this second part of *Henry IV* Falstaff is rather carried on than re-created. There is his great monologue on the virtues of sherris-sack; there are a few scattered sentences, of which the most famous perhaps is: 'I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.' But in this play the wit in himself is conspicuous chiefly by its absence; the wit in other men of which he is the cause becomes only the more striking. For it is, to say the least, very peculiar that in his three most admirable scenes—the scene of his arrest for debt, the tavern scene with Quickly and Tearsheet and Pistol, and the recruiting scene in Gloucestershire, the only scenes in the play which are bathed in the true Falstaffian quality—Falstaff himself has little or nothing to say. In the first it is Mistress Quickly, in the second, Mistress Quickly and Pistol, in the third, Justice Shallow, who set the pace and give the tone. Sir John's presence is rather felt than manifested: the company is fit for him,

we know that he is among it, and our imagination does the rest. Partly through the transferred vitality of his companions, partly in virtue of the radiant afterglow which persists from the first part and appears at the mention of his name, we incline to see him as the same Jack Falstaff, wrapped in the same rich clouds of glory. But he is not. He has his moments of indubitable inspiration; but he is in a decline. He is being kept alive, as it were, only by a transfusion of blood. He has become, in fact, something of a vampire, a Moloch whose veins can be filled only by the sacrifice of fresh children of Shakespeare's creative imagination.

The disease and the heroic remedy point to a single conclusion. Shakespeare had begun to tire of Falstaff. He is no longer interested in him; he is, indeed, interested in anybody rather than him. To enable himself to go on writing comic scenes in which Falstaff can be kept afloat, in which an illusion of Falstaff's presence can be plausibly maintained, he has either to expand characters that existed in outline only, or to invent new ones. Thus in the tavern scene it is the richly-matured Mistress Quickly —first mother of that great succession of comic Cockney landladies and charwomen which ends with Samuel Butler's Mrs. Jupp in *The Way of All Flesh*—and Pistol (why, oh, why, is Pistol so funny, seeing that nine-tenths of his jokes are unintelligible?)—it is these two who carry the thing through. And even in Gloucestershire it is Shallow and Silence and the rich procession of Mouldies, Warts, Feebles, and Bullcalves who bear Sir

John's banner high. Falstaff is no longer the executant, but the impresario. We remember his past triumphs and are content, and when he comes forward to the front of the stage to take his benefit with a monologue on the dangers of thin potations, we are ready for a moment to swear he is as good a man as ever he was. But our heart misgives us; we have a premonition that the end is near.

Now I think that from this evidence alone it is clear that, for some reason or other, Shakespeare's heart was not in his work. The situation is that he is perfectly ready to create new comic characters—he had apparently at this moment an inexhaustible store of them, waiting to be born—but he is not willing to go on creating Falstaff. About the whole of the play hangs an air of lassitude, except in certain of the comic scenes. They are masterly, in so far as they are independent of the fat knight. A particular inhibition in his regard was obviously at work. So much we could deduce from a mere comparison of the second with the first part of *Henry IV*. We might even look for the cause of Shakespeare's disinclination. We might, if we have a turn for the imputation of ideal motives, suggest that it was because Shakespeare realised that Falstaff, in obedience to history, had to be disgraced and rebuffed by Prince Harry. It was not an end which Falstaff had deserved; it was not an end which could be truly assigned to him: for Falstaff belongs to an ethereal world in which such tragic issues are discordant. Shakespeare had to make a creature who had nothing whatever to do with history obey the laws of history. He

was faced with a problem impossible of solution; he knew the impossibility, and lost interest. That would be, in itself, a fairly convincing explanation. I myself believe it counted for something in the final destiny of Falstaff. But, as a professional writer, I should perhaps incline to the simpler and more matter-of-fact alternative. Shakespeare was probably working against time. At this period Shakespeare was as hard-worked, and hard-worked precisely in the same way, as any professional journalist of to-day.

Fortunately for the argument, there is other evidence, and evidence which is, to me, quite conclusive. The second part of *Henry IV* winds up very exceptionally with an Epilogue. Naturally a great deal has been made of this Epilogue, but not altogether, it seems to me, in the right way. No doubt it is interesting, and in some degree important, to know by its evidence that Sir John Falstaff was originally Sir John Oldcastle and that Shakespeare was compelled to change the name owing to protests from the family. But there are surely more important things about it—this paragraph, for instance:

> Be it known to you—as it is very well—I was lately here in the end of a displeasing play, to pray your patience for it and to promise you a better. I did mean indeed to pay you with this; which, if like an ill venture it come unluckily home, I break—and you, my gentle creditors, lose. Here I promised you I would be, and here I commit my body to your mercies.

In the first place, we have to remember, it is the Epilogue (or the Dancer) who speaks, and not Shakespeare, and he speaks not on Shakespeare's behalf, but on that of the company, though Shakespeare wrote his words for him. There is, therefore, no means of knowing whether the play which fell flat was one of Shakespeare's own or not. It *may* have been *As You Like It*, which not only has an Epilogue that is own brother to this one, but also belongs to this period (1597-1599) and does not seem to have been very popular. But that is another question. The point of importance for our present purposes is that it is clear that the regular audience of Shakespeare's company had been displeased, and in order to send them contented home, the Epilogue had been put forward to promise them another play with Falstaff in it. The first part of *Henry IV* had been a roaring success; Falstaff had taken the town, or the play-going part of it, by storm. What was the unfortunate company to do, faced with a hissing audience, but promise it some more 'fat meat'?

So Shakespeare had to put his back into it. More Falstaff, and quickly, too, was, in both senses, the *mot d'ordre*. Perhaps he had a rough outline of the second part in his head. At a pinch, we might interpret 'I did mean, indeed, to pay you with this one' as referring to the the time when the play was promised, and it is perhaps only reasonable to suppose that Shakespeare, confronted with the success of Falstaff, realised, both as playwright and as shareholder in the company, that he would very soon have to produce some more of him. He may have

grown tired of English history, and turned to *As You Like It* in order to put off the evil day. There is no means of knowing. But what we do know—is it not written as large as life all over the Epilogue?—is that, in the event, more Falstaff had to be produced against time. 'Be it known to you—*as it is very well*' has an unmistakably ominous ring. Probably there had been calls for the new Falstaff every night for the last few weeks.

A man of genius can undoubtedly do very marvellous things to order and against time. What he cannot do in such circumstances is the same thing over again. If he has done one thing superlatively he can do another thing superlatively, but he cannot do the same thing superlatively. Simply because he is a creative genius, some profound inhibition is at work to prevent him from repeating himself. And self-repetition was precisely what was required of Shakespeare. The audience was not asking for another Shakespeare play, not even for another comic Shakespeare play, either of which might have been supplied without danger; but it was asking for more Falstaff, according to sample. It was asking the impossible precisely because it asked. Shakespeare, good man of business as he was, would doubtless have gone to any length to supply it; but he was prevented by something more urgent and essential than his business mind. His genius, his dæmon, had a word to say: several words, in fact, and they are spelt Quickly, Pistol, Shallow, Silence. But it hardly got beyond the first syllable of Falstaff.

And at the end he had to promise still more:

> One word more I beseech you. (*We know the gesture: hand uplifted to stem the applause and make a silence.*) If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat (*roars of ironical laughter*), our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair *Katherine of France*: where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat (*pause*)—unless already a' been killed with your hard opinions (*more roars of ironical laughter*); for Oldcastle died a martyr and this is not the man.

But there is, in *Henry V*, no Sir John. 'His heart is fracted and corroborate' before the play begins. No doubt 'his sweet boy's' behaviour at the end of *Henry IV*, Part II, had dealt it something of a blow, but not a very bad one. His heart was sufficiently tough to put up with 'being very well provided for' until his conversation should 'appear more wise and modest to the world.' Of course, if we remember that Falstaff is a created character and not a human being, we must indeed say that this necessity to mend his ways is a death sentence on the knight, and anticipate Pistol in condoling him. A reformed Falstaff is not Falstaff. Still, Shakespeare had obviously left the door open for his return, and the Epilogue leaves no doubt that he was intended to perform some more exploits (perhaps at Agincourt) before his nose became as sharp as a pen. Yet he was killed.

For, in the meanwhile, another burden had been laid upon Shakespeare. The Queen had commanded that the fat knight should be shown in love, and she had fixed a day for the exhibition. It allowed Shakespeare a fortnight for the writing of his play. That is the tradition. It is one of the oldest Shakespeare traditions we possess. It is plausible in itself, for we need to find some explanation why Falstaff should suddenly rush through a couple of centuries to make his appearance in a play of contemporary life, and of contemporary life at Windsor; and, when we come to look more closely into the destiny of Falstaff as we have been doing, we can see that if the tradition did not exist it would have been necessary to invent it. For, between the finishing of *Henry IV*, Part II, and the writing of *Henry V*, Shakespeare's plans with regard to Falstaff changed once more. In the Epilogue he had been ready to promise more of him in *Henry V* on condition that he was allowed to give him his quietus at the end of the play. Instead, he killed him before the beginning of it. So it is obvious that, if Shakespeare was sick of Falstaff by the end of *Henry IV*, Part II, he was sick to death of him by the beginning of *Henry V*. The bare facts are enough to show that there was some intervening circumstance to intensify Shakespeare's weariness with his own creation. Without the tradition, we should have guessed the intervening circumstance was *The Merry Wives*: with the tradition, the explanation is complete.

A Falstaff play to be finished in a fortnight, and at the

Royal Command! Authors and actors take Royal Commands seriously enough even now; even in this twentieth century they cause them sleepless nights. How much more should Shakespeare have been troubled in the sixteenth century when Royalty was a good deal more royal than it is now—Shakespeare who had something of a weakness for blue blood! The marvel is that he should have done so well; for in spite of the superior attitude towards the farce of *The Merry Wives* which is traditional in English criticism, it is a most excellent play. It has to be regarded in and for itself as the separate object that it is. It is no good objecting to it that it is a play of a different kind from the other Falstaff plays. No man, not even the most consummate genius, can command at will the spirit that irradiates the first part of *Henry IV*. Shakespeare had a peculiar problem to solve: to construct an amusing play—a play to amuse a particular person whose taste in laughter was not of the highest—in a record time.[1] He went about it in the way a playwright, faced with the same problem, would go about it to-day. He looked for a strong and sturdy farce-plot on which to build, so that if his invention failed, as it most likely would fail, under pressure, the strength of the mere situation would carry him through: he wanted a plot on whose scaffolding he could depend. Now, it was no use to trust to his imagination to invent incomparable speeches for Falstaff:

[1]Molière's *L'Amour Médecin* was written and played in *five* days: but it has not the real substance of more than a single act of *The Merry Wives*.

they might never come: such things were not to be squeezed out, even of Shakespeare's head.

Whether Shakespeare himself invented the plot of *The Merry Wives* we cannot say. But we can say, knowing his own habit elsewhere, and knowing what a playwright in a like situation would do to-day, that it is improbable. The modern writer would try to get a plot from somewhere, skim through the latest French farces, ask his friends if they knew of anything, hunt up the comedies that held the stage years ago. Not otherwise do we imagine Shakespeare. And when his latest Cambridge editors, with remarkable detective skill, extract from *The Merry Wives* itself fairly convincing evidence that it is a remodelling of a comedy of intrigue set in the contemporary life of Elizabethan London, we are not surprised. It is what we should have expected.

What we could not have expected, however high we place Shakespeare's genius, is that under such circumstances he should have brought off the miracle. *The Merry Wives* is farce, farce of what they call nowadays the 'slap-stick' kind, but the play is sweet as a good apple. The unsavoury smell of the dirty linen in the buck-basket is quite blown away by the country air which pours in from every side. We feel that the stage does not run off at the wings to pasteboard scenery, but to country lanes and hedgerows; it backs not on to a curtain, but on to the rushy margin of the Thames. The play is redolent of early summer—the air is full of May or June. And if Falstaff is no longer the pure ethereal essence of comedy

that he has been, but a rather disreputable adventurer on his beam-ends in a country town—well, we cannot have everything in a fortnight. And, even in this fortnight of slavery—slavery is certainly a mild word for the conditions necessary for the achievement—Shakespeare's pure creativeness would out. His dæmon would *not* be denied. Not only is there the incomparable 'masterpiece of nonentity,' Slender, who, one guesses, belonged to rather too rarefied an order of creation to appeal to his royal audience—the true and only original of the man 'who could not say Bo to a goose' would hardly have struck Elizabeth as funny at all—but there is a really comic Welshman. He may be crude, but he *is* comic. And he plainly went down. Not only was he the chief attraction (after Falstaff himself) on the title-page of the pirated Quarto, under the mistaken style and title of 'Sir Hugh, the Welch knight,' but he was obviously the precursor of Fluellen in *Henry V.* In the manner of Sir Hugh's reception, Shakespeare saw an opening to cover his deliberate murder of Sir John. On that he was determined.

He could take no more risk of command performances whether at the summons of the Queen or of the London groundlings. Falstaff had to die without delay, even though his newly acquired trick of moving on a time-machine through the centuries might make the *coup de grâce* more difficult to give. But Shakespeare was resolute. Falstaff was never suffered to be seen, or even his rich voice to be heard on the stage of *Henry V.* We can say,

beyond any reasonable doubt, that no other of Shakespeare's created characters led his creator such a life as Sir John Falstaff. Shakespeare himself was probably the only human being who was 'cloyed with too much fat meat,' and perhaps it would not be merely fanciful to say that half Shakespeare's other comic characters represent the attempts of his genius to escape from the incubus it had conjured out of nothingness.

This, in rough outline, is the story of Falstaff's creation as I find it written in the plays themselves: first, a magnificent play with a comic character who takes the town by storm—remember that the evidence is that Falstaff was by far the most popular character of Shakespeare's in his own day; then, at the end of the run, the company produces a play which falls flat, the manager goes to Shakespeare while the audience is still booing and hissing, there is a hurried colloquy behind the scenes, Shakespeare (who is a shareholder as well as a playwright) agrees, and the angry audience is sent away contented by the promise of another play 'with Sir John in it'; then, the second part is written against time, with the immediate success that was inevitable—the audience by this time was in the condition of a modern audience at the beginning of a film by Charlie Chaplin: the fat knight had only to appear for the house to rock with laughter—and Shakespeare, foreseeing a life of slavery if he does not take action, declares in the Epilogue that the next play will be the last in which Falstaff will appear; but he is not quick enough, the news of the latest Falstaff success has reached the Queen, she

probably has the second part played at court before her, and at the end commands that Sir John be shown in love. 'When is my first free evening?' she asks the Lord High something or other, who keeps the Royal engagement-book. 'Monday fortnight, Your Majesty.' 'Very well, on Monday fortnight.' If it had been Monday week, no doubt Shakespeare would have had to 'deliver the goods.' He did his work; though he produced not Falstaff but another person of the same name and appearance. But that was the last straw. Instead of keeping his promise to the London audience that his new play should also have 'Sir John in it'—the first mention of him is the news that he is on his death-bed already.

It may be said that all this is theory. In one sense it is; but in that sense all criticism is theory. My little story is a deduction from the facts; I believe it satisfies and accounts for the facts: only I would remind you again that the facts in such an inquiry as this, and in all literary criticism worthy the name, are not the measurable and quantitative facts of science, but more volatile and intangible reactions—intuitions and impressions. But, in their kind, the facts with which I have dealt are admitted: that the Falstaff of the second part is inferior to the Falstaff of the first, and that the play itself is an inferior play; that *The Merry Wives* is of a quite different order from the other Falstaff plays: these judgments are the commonplaces of Shakespeare criticism. But the conclusions drawn from these judgments, when conclusions are drawn from them, are very different from mine.

There are traditional conclusions, as there are traditional judgments. I feel I should be dealing unfairly if I did not examine them.

It is generally said that the degeneration of Falstaff in the second part is due to a deliberate dramatic intention on Shakespeare's part. Falstaff had to be shown in his true colours in order that the fate which awaited him at Prince Harry's hands should be seen to be deserved. So Falstaff is represented as 'in a progressive moral decline.' It is an argument which seems at first sight almost plausible. Then we begin to look at the facts. If we start out by considering Shakespeare wholly superhuman, a demi-god who could by nature make no mistakes, never feel tired, never get bored—well, we shall never be able to see the facts, we shall never be able even to *smell* them through the odour of sanctity. But if we keep our eyes clear, we shall, I think, admit quite freely that the second part of *Henry IV* as compared with the first is a very poor play. The comic scenes have no particular relation to the main dramatic action, and the main dramatic action can be given that name only by an effort of charity. The play, in fact, is slung together rather than designed. The chances that Shakespeare was following a deliberate plan in exhibiting Falstaff in a moral decline are exceedingly poor, to begin with.

But the real question is: Whether Falstaff *is* in a moral decline? Very likely it is true that we, the readers and the audience, are more conscious of his dubious morality in the second part and in *The Merry Wives*. But that is

precisely what would happen if Shakespeare's creative power were weakening and he were failing to maintain his comic hero in the imaginative world in which alone he could truly live. For, in fact, neither in the second part nor in *The Merry Wives* are Falstaff's acts and sentiments by the smallest degree, by one single fraction of a commandment, less moral than they are in the first part. How could they be? We have only to listen to the description with which he was ushered into the world, to read the label tied round his neck when he was dropped from the creative heaven on to the boards of the Blackfriars Theatre, to know that moral degeneration is strictly inconceivable for Sir John.

> 'Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping on benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping-houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous as to demand the time of the day.'

And Falstaff does not deny it; it would be preposterous if he did. Even though he is notoriously reluctant to admit any imperfection in himself, he is forced to confess

that his character has suffered by his keeping company with Prince Harry.

> 'Thou has done much harm upon me, Hal: God forgive thee for it! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over; by the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain: I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom.'

Falstaff was intelligent enough for a hundred, but it would have passed even his wit to find the way to degenerate from the moral altitudes on which he is first presented to us.

The fact is that a truly comic character cannot degenerate morally, for he moves completely outside the kingdom of moral law. He can decline creatively, and quite frequently a creative decline is accompanied by a moral advance. Gogol's Tchichikov is a good case in point. And altogether, as Charles Lamb quite properly argued, the application of the moral judgment to comic heroes is merely a way of blinding ourselves to their real significance. So we are on our guard against the arguments of those who would interpret the fact that we begin to be conscious of Falstaff's moral weakness as meaning that he is less moral than he was; it means simply that Shakespeare is failing to create him. A recent critic, in his desire to show that what Shakespeare did to

Falstaff was deliberately done, has gone so far as to try to whitewash the Falstaff of the first part.

> 'The Falstaff of Part I,' he says, 'is a humorist pure and simple, against whom little that is really reprehensible can be urged. He takes part, it is true, in a highway robbery, but such an offence committed by high-spirited youths was venial, in the eyes of Shakespeare's contemporaries at least. Otherwise there is little evidence on which to impeach Falstaff, except such as he himself furnishes against himself; and that evidence may generally be allowed to pass as the product of a fertile imagination and humorous invention. In the second part, on the contrary, the character of Falstaff is presented unsympathetically and in a uniformly unfavourable light. . . .'

The explanation of the phenomenon, as I have tried to show, is simple. The only light which falls on Falstaff is the light of Shakespeare's creativeness; when it begins to fail and flicker, we begin to be aware of him as a rather disreputable adventurer. He always was that, if we chose to regard him as a real man: but Shakespeare neither intended nor allowed us so to regard him.

But the details themselves do not for one moment bear out this theory of moral degeneration. As a matter of fact, if we consider them realistically, and imagine Falstaff brought before a police magistrate, it is clear that Falstaff's crimes are less serious in the second part

then they are in the first. If in the first they are venial, then they are less than venial in the second. He equally misused the King's Press in both plays. To get yet another ten pounds out of Mistress Quickly—was that a crime when the lady herself condoned it? To borrow a thousand pounds of Justice Shallow, of which the lender would never see even five hundred back again—if Sir John had nothing worse than this on his conscience, Mistress Quickly was right in saying, 'Nay, sure, he is in Arthur's bosom.' And so far from being presented in a uniformly unfavourable light, he is represented as having gained, and somehow as having deserved, the loyalty both of Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Quickly. You may, if you choose, regard Mistress Quickly's parting words merely as the evidence that she, after the reputed habit of her sex, insists on being gulled:

> 'Well, fare thee well; I have known thee these twenty-nine years come peascod-time; but an honester, truer-hearted man—well, fare thee well.'

But the effect of them on most well-ordered sensibilities is quite simple. Mistress Quickly means what she says, and Falstaff, not for what he does but for what he is, deserves that it should be said of him. And up till now no one who was not engaged in making a case has ever thought Bardolph a fool for wanting to be with him wherever he was, or Mistress Quickly a dupe for being certain he was not in hell.

No, it would be truer to say not merely that Shakespeare was not engaged in Part II in presenting Falstaff in a uniformly unfavourable light, but that he was trying at moments to make amends for the creative injustice he knew he was doing to the creature of his imagination. The injustices were two: first, Falstaff had to be produced again when Shakespeare was not in the mood for him; second, and more important, Shakespeare had involved him in a catastrophe that was inevitable. A being who belonged to the ether of pure comedy had to be brought back into the world of fact and history. He was bound to languish and die. What conceivable action of King Harry's could have mitigated his fate? The only thing that could have been done was that Shakespeare should translate the history of England into the same creative world as he had done in Part I. Sooner or later, in such an enterprise, the facts became adamant. Harry the warrior-king was a fact not to be trifled with, any more than Lord Roberts or Lord Kitchener could be trifled with by a popular playwright nowadays. The audience knew quite well what he ought to be and, eventually, Shakespeare had to vamp up a very moderate play—with some patches of dazzling rhetoric—to provide them with what they wanted. But we imagine him with a consciousness of guilt towards the creature he had been forced to betray.

The Falstaff whom the King of England was bound to repudiate was not the Falstaff whom Shakespeare had created. One was a common ne'er-do-well; the other

was an incarnation of the very spirit of comedy. Shakespeare had to pretend that they were the same person; he had to drag his hero down to an earth where he was never meant to live, and inflict upon him a disgrace which he could not possibly have deserved. No one can doubt that Falstaff at his birth was beloved of his begetter. Since his penultimate sufferings were not to be avoided, Shakespeare, who was tired of the labours he had been forced to undergo for Falstaff's sake, would pull himself together and try to ensure that the creature of his brain should make a good end. Once more Shakespeare achieved the miracle. Nothing Falstaff ever said is more magical than the talk of Mistress Quickly and Bardolph and the page about his death: nothing is more truly his than these words he did not speak, by which he is uplifted once more into that ethereal kingdom from which his creator had been forced to force him to descend, in order that the king should 'kill his heart.'

> BARD.: Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell!
>
> HOST.: Nay, sure he's not in hell; he's in Arthur's bosom. A' made a finer end and went away an it had been any christom child; a' parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o' the tide: for after I saw him fumble with the sheets and play with flowers and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and a' babbled of green fields. 'How now, Sir John!'

quoth I. 'What man! Be of good cheer.' So a' cried out: 'God, God, God!' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him a' should not think of God, I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So a' bade me lay more clothes on his feet: I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees, and so upward, and upward, and all was as cold as any stone.

[*September*, 1923.]

CORIOLANUS

CORIOLANUS

Criticism is oddly undecided about *Coriolanus*. Is it because *Coriolanus* is the most neglected of Shakespeare's greater plays? Or is the play neglected because of the indecision it provokes? The divergence of opinion about it is extraordinary. Mr. Lytton Strachey, for instance, has lately declared that 'rhetoric, enormously magnificent and extraordinarily elaborate, is the beginning and the middle and the end of *Coriolanus*. The hero is not a human being at all.' Mr. Bernard Shaw, on the other hand, puts *Coriolanus* with Faulconbridge as 'admirable descriptions of instinctive temperaments,' and says, with intelligible paradox, that 'the play of *Coriolanus* is the greatest of Shakespeare's comedies.' Mr. T. S. Eliot lately maintained that *Coriolanus* is Shakespeare's 'most perfect work of art.'

Divergence of this kind does not in the least resemble the recent controversy as to whether *Hamlet* is an æsthetic success or an æsthetic failure. All the world, and not least those particular disputants, is agreed that *Hamlet* is a mighty work; its precise degree of perfection alone is in debate: its greatness is admitted. Quite otherwise with *Coriolanus*. Nobody seems quite certain if it is a great play or not, and it is so seldom performed that there is no consensus of popular opinion as to its dramatic merits. The reason why it is so seldom performed is that the theme is unsympathetic to the ordinary man, who cannot accept as

a tragic hero one whose ungovernable pride forces him to become a renegade. It is to this instinctive sentiment that Mr. Shaw gives paradoxical expression when he says that *Coriolanus* is the greatest of Shakespeare's comedies. Coriolanus is human enough, but he is so human that we are angry with him for not behaving more sensibly; we do not feel that his conduct is inevitable, like Othello's; we prefer to say that it is life-like. By one burst of temper he exiles himself from Rome, by a second he kills himself. Nothing is changed in him—as he was at the beginning of the play so he is at the end. Whereas a tragic hero *deserves* to die, Coriolanus does not. A hero of great Shakespearian tragedy deserves to die because we cannot conceive him continuing to live. But the death of Coriolanus is a shock to us; we are not surprised that Shakespeare scamped it and, by making Aufidius repent it on the instant, turned it into an accident. To put the matter irreverently, Coriolanus is a big schoolboy; Molière might have disposed of him better than Shakespeare.

Still, not even Molière could have made him live as Shakespeare has. To say, as Mr. Strachey says, that he is not a human being at all, is indeed astonishing. He is, of course, a human being of a quite different kind from the heroes of the great tragedies; but he is more of the human being than they. Compared with Antony, it is true, he is almost thin-blooded; but who is not thin and unsubstantial compared to that king of men? In his own play and his own setting, Coriolanus is absolutely con-

vincing. He is not so complete a man as Antony; he inhabits a sphere of more primitive development, but within that sphere he is fixed as solid as a rock. Coriolanus is Shakespeare's Homeric hero; and it is largely because of the completeness with which he is presented that his tragic end becomes perfunctory. That such a man should meet with a violent end is too natural to be inevitable; his death is a physical rather than a spiritual consummation. To give it a spiritual significance Shakespeare needed to employ another Iago, to arrange the toils into which the instinctive man must fall. But there was no Iago in the story. It is true he might have made Aufidius into one. At the beginning, indeed, he seems to have intended to. Aufidius's speech at the end of the first act:

> Mine emulation
> Hath not that honour in't it had, for where
> I thought to crush in an equal force,
> True sword to sword. I'll potch at him some way
> Or wrath or craft may get him—

begins to put an Iago before us; but Shakespeare could not hold him to his task. Aufidius also, at the critical moment becomes the instinctive Homeric hero. When Coriolanus appeals to him at Antium, he reveals himself as Coriolanus's blood-brother, incapable of treasons, stratagems, or spoils; and there he is so fully presented that the faint-hearted indications of his subsequent

designs have no power to change the figure before us. We feel that he acts in a rage of sudden jealousy, in a burst of temper, like Coriolanus himself. 'My rage is gone,' he says, 'and I am struck with sorrow.' That is true of the Aufidius Shakespeare has actually given us; it is not true of the Aufidius he began by giving us. Aufidius-Iago might have made Coriolanus's death inevitable; the Aufidius we have makes it an accident.

Aufidius is the weak point of the play. Dramatically, his function was to play in the second part of the drama the *rôle* held by Sicinius and Brutus, the Tribunes, in the first, but to play it with more steadiness of hatred even than they, because Aufidius has to compass Coriolanus's death, while the Tribunes need only his exile. But whereas the Tribunes play their part to the life, and we know and follow and comprehend their every move in entangling Coriolanus in his own weakness, Aufidius is as impulsive as Coriolanus himself, and as evidently incapable of plotting as he. Instead of being plainer to us than Sicinius and Brutus, he becomes ten times more shadowy.

But Coriolanus is magnificent, and in so far as he is the play, the play is magnificent also. He is Plato's man of impulse to the life. When his wounds are mentioned we see the schoolboy blush, with more of vanity than true modesty in it, come to his face. He cannot remember the name of the man of Corioli for whose freedom he begs. 'Marcius, his name?' asks Lartius.

> By Jupiter, forgot!
> I am weary; yea, my memory is tired.
> Have we no wine here?

Was the physical man ever more swiftly presented? Coriolanus knows nothing of himself. His consciousness, his memory, his purpose—these are all in the keeping of his mother, Volumnia, or Menenius. His mind is sharp and his eye clear only on the battlefield. When he turns away from it, he is bewildered and lost in a strange country. He cannot notice things or people; he barely recognises the wife whom he loves. The idea that he should behave in the city with the same circumspection with which he orders a battle or takes in a town is quite incomprehensible to him; when his mother suggests it, he cannot understand. It is Volumnia, not he, who has the Consulship in mind when he returns victorious; for plans beyond the battlefield his mind is in abeyance. He does what he is told, like a reluctant child, and, after the fatal outburst of his anger against the citizens, he is hopeless and pathetic; he feels his mother has deserted him.

> I muse my mother
> Does not approve me further, who was wont
> To call them woollen vassals.

And he returns, after much persuasion, to make amends like a child, repeating the key-word of his conduct in case he should forget it. 'The word is mildly.' Past and

future have no existence for him. He remembers only what he feels, the burning glow of an insult that has not been revenged; and not till he sees his mother and his wife before him has he an inkling that he is committing an act of shame in threatening his own city, Rome, with fire and sword. Till that moment Rome is no more than the source of his insult. At the last, with one of those amazing strokes of whose sheer simplicity lesser writers are ever afraid, Shakespeare makes him turn on Aufidius.

> AUF.: Name not the God, thou boy of tears!
> COR.: Ha!
> AUF.: No more.
> COR.: Measureless liar, thou hast made my heart
> Too great for what contains it. Boy! O slave!
> Pardon me, lords, 'tis the first time that ever
> I was forced to scold.

The first time! It is hopeless. Coriolanus is lost in life.

Seeing how marvellously Coriolanus is put before us, it is hard to understand the difficulty which has been felt by many critics concerning Coriolanus's conduct in advancing against his native city. It is apparently felt that his renegade act needs more explanation than Shakespeare has given; and Mr. Case, the editor of the 'Arden' text, quotes, in his excellent introduction, Mr. A. C. Bradley's words:

> As I have remarked, Shakespeare does not exhibit

> to us the change of mind which issues in this frightful purpose; but from what we see and hear, we can tell now he imagined it; and the key lies in that idea of *burning* Rome. As time passes, and no suggestion of recall reaches Coriolanus, and he learns what it is to be a solitary, homeless exile, his heart hardens, his pride swells to a mountainous bulk, and the wound in it becomes a fire. The fellow patricians from whom he parted lovingly now appear to him ingrates and dastards, scarcely better than the loathsome mob. Somehow, he knows not how, even his mother and wife have deserted him. He has become nothing to Rome, and Rome shall hear nothing from him. Here in solitude he can find no relief in a storm of words; but gradually the blind intolerable chaos of resentment conceives and gives birth to a vision, not merely of battle and indiscriminate slaughter, but of the whole city one tower of flame. To see that with his bodily eye would satisfy his soul; and the way to the sight is through the Volscians. . . . This is Shakespeare's idea, not Plutarch's. In Plutarch there is not a syllable about the burning of Rome.

Yet, with all deference to so great an authority, we cannot help feeling that this is Mr. Bradley's idea, not Shakespeare's. Certainly, there is a good deal of talk about the burning of Rome. The Tribunes and Menenius take it for granted; Cominius reports that Coriolanus's eye is 'red as he would burn Rome.' But our impression is not that it is particularly insisted on: it recurs merely, and we

also, like the Tribunes and Menenius, take it for granted. Coriolanus intends revenge.

Mr. Bradley is trying to circumvent the difficulty of Coriolanus's monstrous purpose. He does not leave Rome vowing revenge; he seems to agree with Cominius that he may be recalled. 'I shall be loved,' he says, 'when I am lacked.' Yet, when he reappears, he reappears as the renegade whose fixed purpose is the destruction of Rome. All this is true. But what of it? Shakespeare's Coriolanus sees neither before nor after. He is ignorant of his own nature as a savage. How should the man who cried at the last moment of his life: ''Tis the first time that ever I was forced to scold,' know the hidden workings of his own heart? His purposes loom on him only when they are being accomplished. And surely Shakespeare has taken care that we shall understand him, without our being compelled to invent processes of mind for him; surely, the vital words are the last which Coriolanus speaks to his mother, wife, and friends when he leaves the gates of Rome.

> While I remain above the ground you shall
> Hear from me still, and never of me aught
> But what is like me formerly.

Is not that tragic irony of the highest kind? The monstrous thing that Coriolanus is to do is 'like him formerly.' He who knows nothing of himself may mean it as Menenius understood it, 'That's worthily'; but we, who have

watched his blind, angry blundering bring to naught the considered purposes his friends have fixed upon him, know that the former self, like which he will remain, is a thing of impulse only, of pride and anger and resentment and courage. The Tribunes provoked him and he tried to kill them; Rome has provoked him and he will try to kill it. We know; he does not, and he is far more surprised than we are to find himself entering Antium. His brief soliloquy—his only one in the play—gives us the exact measure and quality of his surprise. 'O world, thy slippery turns!' It seems to him odd and strange that he should be seeking out Aufidius.

> So, fellest foes
> Whose passions and whose plots have broke their sleep
> To take the one the other, by some chance,
> Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends
> And interjoin their issues.

The incredible change in his actions is to him just the result of 'some trick not worth an egg.' He cannot understand it; he can see no more of himself than his actions; and when, confronted with Aufidius, he finds that his action needs some explanation, he instinctively reshapes the immediate past to his purpose. The friends who have tried to protect him and to prevent his suicide, who have offered to share his exile, suddenly become 'the dastard nobles who have all forsook me.' True, that is in Plu-

tarch. But what Shakespeare has done is what Plutarch could never do—to put before us the living man whose thought and words were ever the servants of his impulses alone. Shakespeare has omitted all that Plutarch says about Coriolanus's calculations and plans.

> Whereupon, he thought it his best waye, first to stirre up the Volsces against them (the Romans) knowing they were yet able enough in strength and riches to encounter them, notwithstanding their former losses they had receyved not long before and that their power was not so much impaired, as their malice and desire was increased, to be revenged of the Romaines.

Shakespeare takes all such calculation away from Coriolanus. Instinct sends him to Aufidius: in that he is 'like himself formerly.' 'Like himself formerly,' he suddenly yields to his mother and wife; 'like himself formerly,' he dies.

Coriolanus is the drama, and since he is perfectly presented, the drama is all but perfect. But the weakness of Aufidius remains, and we cannot help speculating how Shakespeare came to fumble with him. Perhaps we may suggest the cause. In Plutarch's story, Aufidius appears on the scene only after Coriolanus has been exiled. We imagine that when Shakespeare first read through the story in North and shaped it as a drama in his mind, he had a clear conception of the part Aufidius was to play

as the man of hate and conspiracy. When he came to write the play, with his eyes fixed even more closely upon North's book than they had been during the writing of *Antony and Cleopatra* a year before, he followed his own conception of Aufidius during the first act. There was nothing in North to change it; Aufidius simply did not appear. But when he reached Coriolanus's exile, and Aufidius made his entry into North, he found a different Aufidius from the one he had conceived. Instead of a man poisoned by jealousy, he found a chivalrous enemy — 'a man of great minde.' Plutarch's Aufidius is said, indeed, to hate Coriolanus; but it is the hate of one enemy for another; and there is something sportsmanlike, schoolboyish even in their rivalry. 'Many times in battels where they met, they were ever at the encounter one against another, like lusty coragious youths, striving in all emulation of honour.' To this suggestion Shakespeare unconsciously succumbed, at a moment when he was following North's language more closely than ever. He forgot the Aufidius he had presented two long acts ago, the Aufidius who had declared his nature thus:

> My valour's poison'd
> With only suffering stain by him . . .
> Where I find him, were it
> At home, upon my brother's guard, even there,
> Against the hospitable canon, would I
> Wash my fierce hand in's heart. . . .

Instead of this, Aufidius now becomes Coriolanus's im-

pulsive counterpart. Shakespeare gives him a magnificent speech:

> Know thou first
> I loved the maid I married; never man
> Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here
> Thou noble thing! more dances my rapt heart
> Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
> Bestride my threshold.

There is no hint of Aufidius's wonderful words in North. But Shakespeare could not resist North's suggestion of 'the emulation of honour.' The noble rivalry still exists. And yet, when he first presented Aufidius, he had used that very phrase to show that Aufidius's nobility was a thing of the past. 'Mine emulation hath not that honour in't it had.' But the temptation was too great. Back comes all the honour to Aufidius's emulation. We are given a moving and magnificent scene. But the two Aufidiuses can never now be reconciled. The poisoned plotter has to carry on the action of the play to its tragic end; but it is the generous opponent who lives in our minds, the man who could no more have suborned assassins to murder Coriolanus than he could have resisted Coriolanus's swift appeal: 'Pray you, Stand to me in this cause!' All through the fifth act we feel that Shakespeare does not know what to do with Aufidius, and in the final scene the conflict of the two characters who bear one name is manifest and unresolved. Aufidius has deliber-

ately plotted Coriolanus's murder, and played even more cold-bloodedly than the Tribunes upon his temper to sting him to an outburst. Suddenly he changes parts again. He becomes the chivalrous enemy.

> My rage is gone,
> And I am struck with sorrow.

To some, perhaps, this attempted analysis of the actual working of Shakespeare's mind in the construction of *Coriolanus* from the material of North's story may appear fanciful; but I believe it gives a coherent psychological explanation of the radical duality in the conception of Aufidius, which has been noticed by many critics before me. As Mr. Case puts it,

> On the whole, Aufidius can be understood as well as despised; but the delineation of the character does not satisfy, and leaves the impression of an unpleasing task, accomplished with as little trouble as possible. It is in contrast with the careful presentation of the Tribunes.

But it is impossible to leave it at that. At one moment, at least, Shakespeare spent all the force of his poetic genius on putting an heroic Aufidius before us, in his speech to Coriolanus; and Shakespeare was not in the habit of shrinking from 'unpleasant tasks' (in Mr. Case's sense of 'unpleasant,' anyhow): he did not flinch from

Iago. When we remember that two acts and a half intervene between the first presentation of Aufidius's character and his reappearance; that at the time of his reappearance Shakespeare was working with his eyes glued to the book; and that the phrase 'emulation of honour' had been as it were a key-word that stuck in his brain from his first reading of North—then, we believe, it becomes clear that under the immediate influence of North, Shakespeare reverted to a conception of Aufidius which had really been dismissed to the past by Aufidius's speech in Act I, sc. 10, and which was inconsistent with his original idea of that dramatic action of the play. Then, perhaps, we may value Aufidius's speech in Act IV, sc. 5, as something more than the most splendid piece of poetry in a play full of splendid poetry—as a precise indication of when and how and for what cause Shakespeare's human instincts triumphed over his artistic purposes.

Of the other characters, there is little that is new to be said. But there is a correspondence in the play which seemed to have escaped attention, though it reveals the subtlety of Shakespeare's characterisation. At the very beginning of the first scene he suggests the strange relation between Coriolanus and his mother. 'Though soft-conscienced men,' says the First Citizen, 'can be content to say it was for his country, *he did it to please his mother* and to be partly proud.' We call this nowadays the Œdipus complex. But what is amazing is the way Shakespeare conveys that Coriolanus and Volumnia together are one being—Volumnia the mind and purpose,

Coriolanus the body and strength. Hence the peculiar subtlety of his creation of Virgilia. There is really no place for her; if she is to be given at all, she must be given in a hundred words. Shakespeare does it with an instinctive gesture. But Virgilia is a being apart. The real being and binding unity is between mother and son. And at the same moment Shakespeare makes them use the same phrase. When Coriolanus has been banished, Volumnia in a frenzy of rage waylays the Tribunes, and cries:

> I would my son
> Were in Arabia and thy tribe before him
> His good sword in his hand.

When Coriolanus is at bay in Antium in the final scene, he also cries:

> O that I had him
> With six Aufidiuses and more, his tribe,
> To use my lawful sword.

Whether the repetition was deliberate, calculated art, who can tell? It does not matter, for if it was not calculated, it is only one more proof of Shakespeare's astonishing instinctive realisation of a blood-bond of temper.

Finally, there are one or two points of textual interpretation upon which suggestions may be welcome. In Act I, sc. 4, l. 40, the Folio text runs thus:

Come on,
If you'l stand fast, we'l beat them to their wives
As they us to our trenches followes
Another alarum and Marcius followes them to gates, and is shut in.

It is important to note that this stage-direction is altered in the modern editions, where it appears as *Another alarum. The fight is renewed. The Volsces retire into Corioles, and Marcius follows them to the gates.* Whether the new direction is better is of no moment; the point is that it is different. The real question at issue is whether Shakespeare wrote 'As they us to our trenches followes.' The rhythm is appalling in itself, and doubly appalling as the conclusion to a soldier's desperate appeal in battle. Nor is it improved, save in a purely mechanical sense, by read 'followèd.' The dramatic force is frittered away by the rhythmical debility. The same incident is referred to a little further on by a Messenger ('I saw our party to their trenches *driven*'), and by Cominius ('Where is that slave which told me they had *beat* you to your trenches?'). Nothing so weak as 'followes' there. Is it conceivable that Shakespeare should have made the prime actor in the heat of battle use the flabby word? At all events, no one will deny that—

Come on,
If you'l stand fast, we'l beat them to their wives
As they us to our trenches!

is better poetry, better Shakespeare, and better drama. Have we the right to improve the Folio? If we take the Folio stage-direction, we find the suspect word in it. If we count spaces as letters, the distance from 'As' to 'followes' in the text is twenty-seven letters; while the distance from 'Another' to 'followes' in the stage-direction is also twenty-seven letters. Surely the conclusion is that in the copy from which the play was set up 'followes' came immediately after 'trenches,' but in the line below. The change of the stage-direction has concealed the process of the corruption.

When Cominius is celebrating Coriolanus's exploits in the Senate, he makes this stirring speech:

> His sword, death's stamp,
> Where it did marke, it took from face to foot:
> He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
> Was timed with dying cries; alone he entered
> The mortal gate of the city which he painted
> With shunless destiny; aidless came off,
> And with a sudden reinforcement struck
> Corioles like a planet.

That is, at least, what the Folio makes him say. But Tyrwhitt conjectured that the first two lines should read:

> His sword, death's stamp,
> Where it did mark, it took: from face to foot
> He was a thing of blood.

Since then, all the editors have followed Tyrwhitt. It may seem that a change in punctuation is trivial. But here the whole meaning of the passage is changed by it, and changed for the worse. For the crucial passage to elucidate this elaborate metaphor is Hamlet I, i. 162. 'The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike, No fairy takes.' 'Takes' is in its good Elizabethan sense of 'infects.' 'Struck Corioles like a planet' shows that the metaphor is continued to the end. Coriolanus's sword infects 'from face to foot.' He is 'a thing of blood,' not in the sense that he was covered with blood, but like the Avenging Angel. The 'shunless destiny' with which 'he paints the mortal gate of the city' is a reminiscence of the plague-mark on the door of an infected house. And finally he 'struck Corioles like a planet,' because 'planet-stricken' was the name for sudden death to which the doctors could assign no cause. The metaphor is splendidly sustained, and it is simply because Tyrwhitt did not recognise that 'takes' bore the still familiar sense of vaccination 'taking' that he altered the punctuation of the passage, and made it difficult for us to understand it.

With less conviction, we offer a suggestion for the famous crux:

> Fortunes blows
> When most struck home, being gentle wounded, craves
> A noble cunning.

Dr. Johnson explained it ingeniously. 'The sense is:

When Fortune strikes her hardest blows, to be wounded and yet continue calm requires a generous policy.' Apart from the intolerably awkward syntax, the use of 'gentle' is unparalleled; and, after the straightforward lines that precede, the sudden tangle brings us up with an unpleasant jar. When Shakespeare overrides syntax, he usually makes his sense quite clear. Moreover, Coriolanus is quoting his mother's proverbs. The three before have the simplicity of proverbs; this one is a riddle. We cannot believe that Shakespeare wrote the lines as they stand. The natural sense in the context is, 'Fortune's blows when most struck home, being . . . crave a noble cunning.' The three words beginning with 'being' represent a phrase in opposition to, and explanatory of, 'Fortune's blows when most struck home.' We suggest, diffidently, that behind the meaningless 'gentle' is concealed the adjective 'tentles' (tentless, i.e. impossible to probe), and that the line originally read:

When most struck home, being tentless wounds do crave
A noble cunning.

They are wounds beyond the skill of the ordinary surgeon.

Shakespeare in this martial play was particularly fond of using the word 'to tent' metaphorically, *see* i., 9, 31, and in particular iii., 1, 235. ''Tis a sore upon us you cannot tent yourself.'

Of minor importance textually, but of some significance for the psychology of Coriolanus, are two changes

from the Folio made by all the editors. In iii., 1, 91 Coriolanus breaks out at Sicinius's word 'shall remain.'

> Cor.: Shall remain!
> Hear you this Triton of the minnows? Mark you
> His absolute 'shall'?
> Com.: 'Twas from the canon.
> Cor.: 'Shall!'
> O God! but most unwise patricians: why
> You grave but reckless senators. . . .

Theobald's change of 'O God!' to 'O good, but most unwise . . .' has been universally followed. The original sounds to me much more like Coriolanus. Further in ii, 2, 74, Coriolanus says to Brutus, the Tribune:

> You sooth'd not, therefore hurt not; but your people
> I love them as they weigh—
> Menenius: Pray, now, sit down!

For some inscrutable reason the dash of the Folio has been replaced by a full stop. Dashes to mark interruption are not so plentiful in the Folio that we can afford to throw them away. Menenius, as ever, tries to stop Coriolanus from his furious outburst. We could supply Coriolanus's unspoken words from this very play. Probably they were: 'That's lesser than a little!'

[*July*, 1922.]

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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SIGNIFICANCE is an imposing word, it is also a vague one. It may mean importance, it may mean merely meaning: probably it is most at home, and therefore most serviceable, when it stands for something between the two. Let us say, then, that significance is important meaning, and that in trying to discuss the significance of Russian literature, we are trying to elucidate the meaning it has which is of importance to ourselves.

And here again, we may easily be vague. Ourselves are fluctuating, nebulous things at best. And even when we compel them to a shape, the shape has many facets. I, for instance, am a man and also a writer; and Russian literature has an important meaning for me in both these capacities. It has taught me as a writer that the conception of 'art' which still dominated English literature when I commenced apprentice, is founded on a quite modern and one-sided emphasis on a single, formal element in literature: an exaltation of what Pater called the qualities of mind at the cost of what he thought the more precious qualities of soul. In other words, Russian literature has a quite peculiar significance in the purely literary evolution of modern times. It has done more than any other single influence to diminish the prestige of the French conception of literary art.

That is, without doubt, an important meaning of Russian literature, but the importance is a special one. If

we were to analyse it, we should probably find that it was only an outward visible sign of a significance of another kind. Nevertheless, it exists in and for itself. What we may call, in the widest sense, the technical influence of Russian literature has been already considerable, and is only beginning.

But the significance of Russian literature, as I understand it, is far greater, far more direct, and far simpler than that. The selves for which it has importance are the simplest, most naked, and most essential selves,—those elements in our nature, let us say, though it is rather unfashionable, which desire before all things to be good.

Russian literature is absolutely permeated, saturated through and through, with a sense of the problem of conduct. Not merely the great writers have this problem for ever fermenting in their minds, but the smaller ones also. It not only directs the creative impulse in a Tolstoy and a Dostoevsky, but in a Gogol and a Tchehov also. Now perhaps it might be said that this in itself is nothing new, though I believe that the concentration of the whole force of a literature on such a problem is very new. But what is undoubtedly new is the directness with which the Russian writers naturally approach the problem.

The problem they are tormented by is the problem of conduct: the question that is always present to their mind is: How shall we live? and the spirit in which they approach it is one that can only be described as a spirit of complete loyalty to humanity. By that I mean that the Russian writer holds it instinctively as an axiom that a way

of life to be truly satisfying must be based on a harmony of the human faculties. Heart and mind must be at one. There must be no piecemeal realisations. If the claims of the moral nature of man are in conflict with the claims of his intellectual nature, then the house is divided against itself and must fall. What is good, says the Russian, must be true.

In essence, I suppose, this is the Greek attitude. But the mere thought of comparing the Greek attitude with the Russian seems fantastic. Not perhaps because the attitudes themselves are so profoundly different, but because the vehemence with which they are held is. There is also another reason for the obvious unlikeness: but of that later. The first is a difference of vehemence. No doubt some of the causes of this lie deep within the Russian temperament; but one, at least, we English are well fitted to appreciate. The Russian has been always denied the proper political satisfaction of man. The Greeks had that: we have that: the Russians never. Now there are two principal gains to be had from the natural exercise of political activity. One is the absorption of a great deal of spiritual energy which has to find an outlet somewhere: the other the habit of compromise, the practical sense of allowances to be made, not so much for other human beings as for life itself: the instinctive knowledge that life cannot be perfect, that it can be, at the very best, only an approximation to the heart's desire: that it is an oddly imperfect mixture, and that we have to accept its imperfection.

The Russian, on the contrary, had a vast amount of spiritual energy not thus employed, and he was not compelled by the inherited wisdom of centuries of experience to acquiesce in the imperfection of life. He employed his energies in scrutinising it passionately, passionately yet in a sense abstractly, in the tiniest detail yet speculatively. The mere fact that he could not touch the pattern made him the more convinced that it ought to be perfect.

I do not wish to lay too much stress on this contrast. It is important, I believe; but I also suspect that in regarding this peculiarity of the Russian spirit as the consequence of its political history we may be taking for a cause what is really an effect. What seems to us, as Englishmen, a failure in the Russian to evolve a political system which could satisfy his energies, may not be a failure at all. It may simply be that the Russian is not deeply interested in the kind of life which we regard as natural to man. We have, for example, to reckon with the fact that so many great Russian writers either made their peace with the autocracy or declared themselves indifferent to political reform as a thing of no spiritual consequence. For the moment, we may take our choice: either the peculiar intensity of spirit which finds expression in Russian literature is the consequence of the denial of normal political satisfactions, or the cause of their absence. The old autocracy, and the inverted autocracy which has now taken its place, may be symptoms rather than causes of a spiritual state which is strange to us.

The strange spiritual atmosphere is there: and we

must try to define it further. Perhaps we can get nearer to it by considering another paradoxical element in Russian literature. The most casual student of Russian literature during the nineteenth century—and one great fact about it is that it *all* belongs to the nineteenth century—is struck by the immense contrast between the creative literature and the criticism. The criticism, even of men like Bielinsky and Mihailovsky, seems oddly inadequate to the literature: they seem so different as to be almost incommensurable. The Russian critic is for ever judging an author by the political views he expresses, or—this seems to be the most fearful crime of all—by the political views he omits to express. This is, if we reflect, intelligible enough. Under the censorship of the autocracy it was inevitable that literature should have to carry the weight of meanings and interpretations which are primarily political: it was the only medium of expression. A book by a great writer was a political utterance: and if there was a studied absence of political intention in it, it was (and perhaps more fundamentally) still a political utterance. We can understand the phenomenon. But what makes it more interesting is that the Russian writers themselves accepted criticism of this kind: they regarded it as natural, and—still more remarkable—when they turned their hands to criticism themselves, it was criticism of this kind that they wrote. If you have read Dostoevsky's novels, and you have also read *The Journal of an Author*, the regular periodical criticism which he wrote during the last established years of his life, you will surely

have been struck by the strange discrepancy between them. Here is an author of novels which for sheer psychological subtlety have never been surpassed, writing criticism that is a compound of elementary ethics and visionary politics, in the intervals of composing *The Brothers Karamazov*. And there is the same paradox to be seen in Tolstoy.

This appears a paradox to us, and I puzzled over it a long while; I forgot to take into account the position of the observer. I forgot I was an Englishman with a natural habit of looking upon politics and, in a way, upon ethics also, as practical affairs. I forgot that separation between the practical and the contemplative which is the source of our political strength. Suddenly it dawned on me that for the Russian mind this separation did not exist: that for it the temporal government of man was really only a symbol or parable of the spiritual, and—if I may be forgiven an imaginative flight into history—that Holy Russia was really the modern embodiment of that strange, half-real, half-legendary institution after which our imaginations grope through the mists of the Dark Ages, the Holy Roman Empire, into which Charlemagne was inducted long centuries ago by Pope Hadrian. Then also the division between the temporal and the spiritual did not exist: then also the political unity of mankind seemed a necessary conception simply because all men had immortal souls, because they were brethren in Christ, and on earth must be the equal children of the two great vicegerents of God.

That, some may say, is a mediæval conception. It is: but it is not less sublime for that. The Holy Roman Empire, as the mediæval mind conceived it, lasted but a little while: the Holy Russian Empire has lasted but a little while. I do not want to point the parallel between them, but only to suggest that by imagining the Holy Russia of the nineteenth century as in some sort a recurrence of the Holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne, by realising that their strangeness is in some essential qualities deeply similar, we can perhaps more easily appreciate the peculiarities and importance of the Russian spirit and the literature in which it is expressed.

For one thing, the closeness of the correspondence which was in the time of Charlemagne's empire expected between the spiritual and the temporal condition of man, is disconcerting to us. We separate them utterly; whole periods of our history have been engrossed in divorcing them; religion, we say, is a man's private concern. No doubt that is a valuable practical lesson we have learned; how valuable we may guess from the fact that the rest of the world has come to us for it. But the point is that it is only a practical approximation. Religion is not altogether a man's private affair, if one religion enjoins upon him the duty of brotherly love, and another to spoil the Egyptian. The political tradition of the West is to *make* a man's religion indifferent by preventing him from spoiling the Egyptian. We fix the rules of conduct according to our practical knowledge of what men will do if they get the opportunity, and feel that we can safely

leave the motives of their conduct to themselves. We are wise in this generation: we live under the reign of law: we are so used to it that we do not even notice it.

Perhaps I can put the strange difference in the temper of Russian literature best by saying that the Russian mind does not naturally live under the reign of law. The act has not for it, as it has for us, a fixed and final importance in itself. The act is only a manifestation of a thought or a belief or a desire; and often conversely, what a man thinks or believes, that must he act. Just as the spiritual and the temporal were inextricably knit in the Russian Empire under a Cæsar who was himself the embodiment of State and Church together, so in the individual Russian, act and belief were one: there is no separation between the practical and the spiritual man. Therefore what I called roughly 'the problem of conduct,' which underlies Russian literature, is not—as the phrase suggests to us—chiefly a practical problem. It is not so much a question of how shall a man act, as of what shall a man believe? And when the famous Russian critics seem to us to be putting crude and rather irrelevant questions to famous Russian authors, they are in a sense speaking in parables. A political dogma has for them a whole background of religious or spiritual conviction.

The Russian mind, I have said, does not naturally inhabit the kingdom of law. For it, an act is not a definite, discrete thing: it is, as it were, merely a facet of a thought. And immediately there emerges the reason, or at least one reason, for a quality of Russian literature which

impresses the most casual reader. The moment you take the emphasis off the act, and put it on the mind expressed in the act, the inclination to definite moral judgment diminishes: and not only the inclination, but the possibility also. Only so long as it is viewed externally (or legally) does an act remain a thing which we can judge right or wrong with the same positiveness that we pronounce a pillar-box red. Begin to consider acts as parts of thoughts, and certainty vanishes. Thoughts and beliefs may be wrong, of course; but, right or wrong, they have a look of inevitability. You begin to feel that a man cannot help thinking in a certain way any more than he can help the colour of his hair: if you can make instinctively what is for us the difficult leap which separates the act and the thought, you cannot help going farther and seeing the thought as an aspect of personality, and personality as a thing given, ultimate, irreducible, and in some way miraculous and sacred. You have given to the practical and spiritual nature of man a unity which you cannot again divide by a moral judgment.

The Russian mind (or at least the mind of Russian literature) is not merely free from moral prejudice, but profoundly averse to moral judgment of any kind. It has what some people would nowadays call a scientific attitude towards the conduct of men, but it did not reach it by way of the scientific outlook; and as a matter of fact the spirit of Russian tolerance is in quality as remote from scientific indifference as it is from the English spirit of toleration. The Russian eye sees humanity in a warm

light; science in a bright, but cold one; on the other side, our English toleration is a practical virtue; we hesitate to interfere, but do not hesitate to condemn. The Russian hesitates to condemn, but he would not hesitate to interfere. Our wisdom has been acquired by centuries of political experience and experiment: the wisdom of the Russian mind, of another kind than ours, hangs round it like a cloud of glory and cometh from afar. Hence you have the further paradox, again only apparent, that a people which has more than any other a spirit of tolerance almost divine, has only the most rudimentary conception of personal freedom as we understand it.

I hope these distinctions will not seem to you tedious, wire-drawn, and almost casuistical. In a way they are subtle; but I believe that they are also fundamental. To me, entering into the Russian mind is like entering a world of another spiritual dimension. There is a strangeness everywhere: everything is exciting, and everything is odd; and one is conscious intuitively of a logic which holds this unfamiliar universe together, yet one finds it hard to give a clear statement of its laws. I mean that the difference between the Russian attitude and our own is at once both simple and profound; we have only to look on life with changed eyes; but to render an account of the change that is necessary is perhaps more difficult than to make it.

The instinctive suspension of moral judgment which I have tried to explain leads straight to some strange consequences. The Russian, as much as any and more than most, is conscious of the presence of pain and evil in

the world, but he is far less able than another to ascribe it to guilt in the individual. He is forced to believe in an evil and a good which are absolute. Rather, I should say, this is what he desires to believe in. This is the kind of certainty in which his mind could rest; and the desire to discover such a certainty is, I believe, the driving impulse in those great Russians whom their countrymen so simply and superbly named 'God-seekers.' Dostoevsky lavished himself upon imaginary conceptions of this type — men who deliberately violate the moral law, who consciously trample on their own conscience, in order to discover whether retribution will follow. Will God punish them to prove that He exists? Behind it all is the feeling: if man may not condemn, God must: if God does not condemn, there is no God. Ah, yes, it may be said, but the Russian idea of religion, of Christianity, is less terrible than that: the real Christianity of Russia is based on the belief that God is love. That also is true. The Russian mind does instinctively fasten on the figure of the Christ; who is, in a sense, the incarnation of the highest Russian morality. But the distinction which all men in some measure feel between Christ and God, the Russian pushes to an extreme. They set such value on Christ the man that they cannot truly conceive Him as Christ the God. Christ is a morality; but God must be a truth. The God for whom the 'God-seekers' spend their lives in searching is He to whom Christ called at the last, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'

These remarks on religion were inevitable, because

the figure of Christ has a cardinal importance for the Russian attitude. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, whose imaginations were haunted by Him, were in this, as in so much else, only the great types of the Russian spirit. The great Russians are so often men of whom Dostoevsky's words hold good: 'They love Christ so much that Christianity is impossible for them.' Still, we may regard the impulse of the God-seekers more generally as a single form of the Russian hunger for an absolute.

I would almost say, the Russian hunger for absolutism. The Russian mind contemplates a world in which it cannot judge and cannot condemn. Some one must, however, judge and condemn, if life is to be practicable at all. So the Russian mind is often content, in temporal affairs, to leave the power of judgment and condemnation to an arbitrary power: it is prepared, if need be, to find a spiritual justification for it, as Dostoevsky did. And two other great Russian writers, Tolstoy and Tchehov, were in their hearts political indifferentists. This attitude of theirs, it seems to me, is only a practical manifestation of the desire which is constant in the Russian mind—the desire for a certainty which cannot be questioned. Life, as the Russian mind sees it, is infinitely fluid: not a chequer of black and white, of good and evil, but a vast expanse of shining gray. In life, the Russian mind takes everything for granted; it sees the excuse for everything. But it makes up for this instinctive tolerance, by an amazing dogmatical rigidity where we should least expect it—in intellectual things. A political theory can

become in Russia as sacred as the Divine word; and we have lately seen one propagated with all the inquisitorial appurtenances of fire and sword. Again, Dostoevsky could be monstrously unjust to Turgenev, simply because Turgenev believed that Russia might learn a good deal from Western Europe. And yet again Tolstoy could be monstrously unjust to the whole mind of man, simply because, in his hunger for an absolute, he had decided to find one in the soul of the peasant. Any one who reads Tolstoy's *What is Art?* or Dostoevsky's attacks on the Westerners, without knowing their novels, would conclude that a great Russian was necessarily a great bigot.

He would be wrong, hopelessly wrong. The intellectual dogmatism of the Russian mind is in inverse proportion to the tolerance of the Russian soul; it is also, as I have tried to indicate, a consequence of it. The Russian pardons so much that when he does try to condemn, he cannot be judicial: the attitude is foreign to him.

But Russian dogmatism is a secondary quality. It is peculiar and disconcerting, and for that reason worth attention, but it is not an essential quality of Russian literature. It is the product of a desperate intellectual reaction of the Russian spirit against its own instincts. The Russian writer grows weary of accepting everything; he feels that he is removed only by a hair's-breadth from accepting nothing—that universal sympathy is next door to nihilism (as it is)—and he clutches at a certainty in the hope of repose. But he finds no repose. The Russian spirit cannot repose. It is restless, and wanders over the

face of the earth, seeking a home in vain. When Dostoevsky said that the Russian wanderer needs the happiness of all men wherein to find his own peace, he spoke the truth. But the truth is double-edged. We may regard it either as a statement of the deep disinterestedness of the Russian spirit, or of the utter hopelessness of its efforts. A man who depends for his happiness on the happiness of mankind, is doomed to misery; he will be all his days a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And here, I think, we touch upon the central reality of Russian literature, the secret of its fascination, and its significance. Complete acceptance—nihilism: these are the poles of the Russian spirit. They belong to each other; they are aspects of the same reality, and both alike are strange to us. The range of Russian literature is greater than that to which we are normally accustomed. I carefully refrain from saying that it is greater than the actual range of English literature, for reasons which I will try to give. I can perhaps put the relation best in this way. There are notes at the upper and lower end of the octave which are not habitually sounded in Western literature, and these are constantly sounded in Russian literature. These upper notes have a direct relation to the lower notes; they depend for their existence upon each other. But it is difficult to sound them both except in literature that is representative, that is, in the drama or the novel. In pure poetry it is possible only to sound the upper notes. When English poetry had its most comprehensive form, when it was dramatic, you have both the

upper and the lower notes sounded—in Shakespeare supremely, but in some of the other Elizabethan dramatists also, in Marlowe at moments, in Webster at moments. But in our other great literary period, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which was a period of non-dramatic poetry, you get only the upper notes. And we do not pay a great deal of attention to them because they are isolated: the upper notes here have not the dark volume of the lower notes evidently behind them to drive their significance home to us.

I will return to this and try to make my meaning clearer. For the moment, I will only say that the habitual range of Russian literature, which is almost entirely a literature of representation—a novel literature—is greater than the habitual range of our own. Perhaps we have no writer save Shakespeare who has expressed, in the sense in which Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and Tchehov express it, an attitude of complete acceptance, that is to say, an apprehension of human life as something which, in *all* its manifestations, exists in its own right. 'Do not forswear the beggar's wallet or the prison,' says an old Russian proverb. And, though we may think of many Western writers besides Shakespeare who have not forsworn the beggar's wallet or the prison, if we think of them again we shall find that they were conscious, in spite of their seeming acceptance of the underworld, that it was another world than their own. They may have crossed the dividing line, but they never forget that the dividing line is there, separating the sheep from the goats, the good

from the bad, the successful from the unsuccessful. They are aware of their own condescension. But the Russian writer is not. His difficulty is not to forget that the dividing line exists, but to believe in its existence at all. 'To judge between good and bad, between successful and unsuccessful,' says Tchehov somewhere in his letters, 'would need the eye of God.' You must take that literally; it means that a man, precisely because he is a man, cannot judge. That *sounds* familiar enough in our ears. We have heard from our youth up, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' We know the words well enough, just as we know, 'I say unto you, Love your enemies.' But the reality beneath the words—what man of the West has ever dreamed of believing in that? Or who, among Englishmen, has ever left the judgment of the wicked or the punishment of his enemies to God? Why, our whole civilisation is built upon the very opposite of such beliefs. And rightly so built; we feel that such beliefs do not work. Indeed, they do *not* work. But it seldom crosses our minds that in putting aside beliefs that do not work, we have prejudged the issue. We never say to ourselves: Perhaps the truth may be that the importance of these dark sayings of the founder of the Christian religion may be precisely in the fact that they do not work; that they are utterly and absolutely impossible in practical life; that they mean that the man who 'would see God' has to take hold of life in his two hands and throw it into the abyss; that a complete Christianity is a complete nihilism.

Now I do not want to make out that Russian literature

is completely Christian in this mystical sense; but I do want to persuade you that it is more Christian than any literature has ever been. It is fantastic and strange and fascinating to us in the same way as the sayings of Christ are fantastic and strange and fascinating. One feels that the spirit which moves it is always making towards a desperate gamble with human life; that it will take any risk in order to have ultimate certainty, in order 'to see God.' Tolstoy's end, his wandering out into the darkness to meet his death alone, his throwing away from him in a final symbolic gesture all the happiness of that life with which we are chiefly concerned, is characteristic of a central impulse in Russian literature. It is the feeling that there is a secret of life which can be discovered only by a strange sacrifice, and that life must remain unintelligible until it is discovered. Men of science also talk of the secret of life; but for the secret of life in that sense the Russian cares little or nothing. He is tormented by the desire for an answer to the question: Why is the world of men what it is? And his torment is more intense because he knows better than most men exactly what the world of men *is*. He has looked upon it without blinkers, without rose-coloured spectacles: no other literature brings us into direct contact with life as Russian literature does. Tolstoy on the one hand, Dostoevsky on the other, seem completely to have explored the universe of human action and thought. And it is precisely because they see so much and so clearly that they are haunted by the question, Why? Now, the Christian answer, I should say

more generally the religious answer, to this question, is that God has ordained it so. The man who can truly accept that answer is the religious man; but only he can truly accept who has truly seen. The Russian writer does *not* accept the answer. Herein he shows what I have called his loyalty to humanity. If God has ordained it so, then he replies like Tchehov, 'I must see with the eye of God.' If there is a harmony, then it must be a harmony that is visible to man. If it is visible to God, then man must be able to be God.

This torturing debate goes on and on throughout the works of Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky, more obviously than any other Russian writer, set out the argument in an intellectual and imaginative embodiment. You have it completely uttered in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan Karamazov returns God the ticket. If there is a harmony, he says, he will refuse to accept it. The pain which has been suffered by one single child will make a discord; nothing can atone for it. Even if one day it were to be revealed to him that there was a harmony, says Ivan, he must make haste to refuse it in advance. He will not pay the price for it. Nevertheless, precisely what Ivan refuses, his young brother Alyosha experiences directly; and because he does actually experience the harmony, Ivan's gesture of refusal is impossible for Alyosha. There is no logic in this consummation; it is a miracle. Ivan's refusal holds good so long as this miracle is withheld, even though Ivan himself acknowledged that strange love in his bowels 'for the sticky buds.' But that instinctive love of

life and the intellectual rejection of it could never be reconciled. Nothing short of a change of consciousness, a new way of apprehension could serve. The new way was opened to Alyosha.

The passage which begins with these words is familiar to all readers of Dostoevsky:

> He did not stop on the steps either, but went quickly down; his soul overflowing with rapture, yearning for freedom, space, openness. The vault of heaven full of soft shining stars stretched out vast and fathomless above him. The Milky Way ran in two pale streams from the zenith to the horizon. The fresh, motionless, still night enfolded the earth. The white towers and golden domes of the cathedral gleamed out against the sapphire sky. The gorgeous autumn flowers, in the beds round the house, were slumbering till morning. The silence of the earth seemed to melt into the silence of the stars. The mystery of the earth was one with the mystery of the stars.

Now the particular form in which this ecstasy of acceptance is expressed is peculiar to Dostoevsky; but I think you will find the process of mind of which it is the culmination, and the culmination itself even more wonderfully expressed in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's final period—the period of *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*—is often called a period of serenity. I do

not believe that it was any more serene than Dostoevsky's final period, or Tolstoy's, or Beethoven's: I do not believe that the greatest men of genius are ever serene. What happens to them, I think, is that they give up the struggle to understand. Perhaps I am rash to generalise; but at any rate I should like to point out the strange likeness between Shakespeare's serenity and Dostoevsky's. If you consider Shakespeare's last plays, you will find that common to them all is an emphasis on youth and a wistful, half-certain faith in it: Perdita, Imogen, Marina, Miranda, Ferdinand, Florizel—these are the figures which haunted Shakespeare's mind as it was growing old. Further, you will, I think, admit that these plays of so-called 'serenity' which are so often supposed to answer the problems of the great tragic period which began with *Hamlet* and culminated in *Antony and Cleopatra* do not, in fact, answer those problems at all. The plays of the final period are smaller in scope; the general effect is something as though the Beethoven of the Ninth Symphony and the Great Mass had finished up as Mozart,—beautiful, magical, but as it were dancing aside from the full shock of human destinies. So Shakespeare, in his final period, turns aside from his own problems. We feel that he is weary of them; that he has found them unanswerable in terms of the human existence from which they arise. What he does is to create a new generation of beings who trail their clouds of glory with them still, young hearts about which the shades of the prison house will never close, minds—

For which the burthen of the mystery,
For which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened,—

is more than lightened, has ceased entirely to exist. Shakespeare looked forward in imagination to the birth of a new race, which, like Miranda, would look upon the world with the rapt eyes of wonder: 'O brave new world, That has such creatures in it.' Shakespeare's Mirandas and Perditas are the counterpart of Dostoevsky's Alyosha. We cannot tell how far either of these men of genius believed in his own creation; perhaps less than we do; but the meaning of the creations is the same.

I point this parallel in order to show what I hinted at before—that the preoccupations of Russian literature are not really different from those of our own; and perhaps this truth has been accidentally confirmed by the fact that the condition of mind from which Dostoevsky sought an issue has been most naturally illustrated by a quotation from Wordsworth. I might equally have sought the illustrations in the strange, disturbing text of the final version of Keats's *Hyperion*. The preoccupations of the Russian spirit are not peculiar, but universal. What differentiates Russian literature is the clearness and directness with which these preoccupations and the condition of mind from which they arise are expressed, the way in which the creative energies of a whole literature were focused and concentrated upon them, and the com-

prehensiveness with which they are presented. The English genius, in its highest manifestations not less responsive to these supreme spiritual issues, rises more gradually than the Russian from the realm of practical consciousness. The sudden speculative flight of the Russian, embracing the temporal and the spiritual in a single sweep, the instant readiness to set the whole of earthly life at hazard, the deep-rooted feeling in the Russian soul expressed in the words of a Russian critic, that 'any answer is better than none,' these qualities are not quite central to the English genius, and if they were precious qualities of its own would have to make way for them.

The difference, I say, is chiefly one of concentration. The Russian has not passed, as we have, through centuries of history spent in perfecting an existence wherein ultimate questions should not enter to disturb. He has not the weight of inherited social wisdom to steady (from one point of view), to retard (from another) his abruptness in questioning the whole scheme of things. Therefore the tempo of the Russian spirit is different from ours, and we are sometimes slow to recognise with our minds, though we have recognised it quickly enough with our hearts, the close affinity between the underlying motives of great Russian literature and our own.

Indeed, Russian literature is, historically, a fulfilment of our own. The mastery which was ours at the beginning of the last century passed indisputably to Russia. But the problems which tormented our three great poets of a

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century ago, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats and, more crudely, Byron, are the problems which were taken up by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Tchehov. In their simplest form they resolve into this: 'How shall man be reconciled to life? Is reconciliation and acceptance possible?' Byron presented the problem, or rather himself embodied it, in an imposing, dramatic way which struck the imagination of Europe; and the father of Russian literature, Pushkin, is the direct descendant or disciple of Byron, though his poetry is far subtler and more magical than Byron's ever was. But Byron was, compared to the other three English poets I have named, superficial and stagey; he holds a larger place in the literature of Europe than he does in our own. His grandiose gesture was designed to be seen at a distance. For a profound handling of the problem we must go, however, to Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley. Each of these men, though two of them died mere boys, fought out the issue to some sort of solution. What the particular solutions were there is no time to discuss here: they are to be found in *Tintern Abbey*, in *Adonais*, and in the Revised Induction to *Hyperion*. Speaking roughly, Wordsworth found the answer in a direct intuition of an essential harmony in the human universe when,

> With an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy
> We see into the life of things.

So did Dostoevsky's Alyosha. Shelley's answer is really

of the same kind, though he uses the language of Platonism:

> That sustaining love
> Which through the web of being blindly wove
> By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
> Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
> The fire for which all thirst.

And Keats's answer is in his vision of Moneta, from the height which none can usurp

> But those to whom the miseries of the world
> Are misery and will not let them rest.

Let me read the description of Moneta; for that goddess is a wonderful symbol of the harmony apprehended by a great poetic mind.

> Then saw I a wan face
> Not pined by human sorrows, but bright-blanched
> By an immortal sickness which kills not;
> It works a constant change, which happy death
> Can put no end to: deathwards progressing
> To no death was that visage; it had past
> The lily and the snow; and beyond these
> I must not think now, though I saw that face.
> But for her eyes, I should have fled away;
> They held me back with a benignant light,

Soft, mitigated by divinest lids
Half-closed, and visionless entire they seemed
Of all external things; they saw me not,
But in blank splendour beamed, like the mild moon,
Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
What eyes are upward cast.

An apprehension of harmony which includes, and by including, justifies all evil and pain, is the end to which those three great poets strove, and the quest was taken up by the great Russians. Such a harmony, if it exists, is a thing of which the human soul, under the present dispensation, can have but fleeting glimpses. And even in those who have it the moment of vision is followed by the moment of disbelief. After he has told of the moment in which 'we see into the heart of things,' not even Wordsworth can refrain from crying, 'Oh, if this be but a vain belief.' The same doubt troubles them all. So some of the great spirits, like Shakespeare and Dostoevsky, imagine a new race of beings whose vision of harmony shall be constant, for whom the glory shall not pass away: another giant, Tolstoy, believes, or tries to believe, that the miracle will happen if he can throw his life away and face, like Lear, the elements alone. This Titan, who was of the earth earthy, sees the most naked manifestation of evil in death; in the cessation of the life which had been poured into him so abundantly. And he passes more and more under the spell of the strange teaching of Christ; it is the most mystical and incompre-

hensible elements in that teaching which fascinates him — utter humility and non-resistance to evil. The man who was by nature the realist of realists, who had the gift of re-creating physical life as perhaps no one, not even Shakespare, had it before him, rushes destiny-driven into the most unearthly of all religions in the hope that he will thus be able to see with the eyes of God.

Nowadays it often happens that to say that a literature is inspired by the question, 'Does God exist?' provokes only a slightly contemptuous smile. What an odd and provincial concern! whisper the wise young men of to-day. Literature cannot have a moral purpose; literature is Art. But great literature happens to be a great deal more than art; it is art used for the presentation of the deepest issues of human life. And the deepest issue of all is precisely this question: Does God exist? But we have to understand the question. It means: Is there a harmony in this various, contradictory, and pain-ridden world of ours? The existence of God means that there is such a harmony. And, again, before we have the right even to put the question so, we have to be deeply conscious of the apparent discord, oppressed by the problems of pain. The words of Keats are true:

> None can usurp this height
> But those to whom the miseries of the world
> Are misery and will not let them rest.

Of the Russian writers that holds good pre-eminently.

I have tried to give some reasons why it is truer of them than it is of the writers of most nations, unless they belong to the highest order.

The Russian has not learned to attach the names of good and evil to acts; he attaches them to beings. Those who, like most socially civilised nations, think of good and evil chiefly in the form of acts, come naturally to believe that evil is eradicable. An evil act can be punished or prevented; but an evil being is much more elemental. And so the Russian sees the problem of human life much more nakedly than we naturally do. Hence, also, comes that quality of an almost divine sympathy with the social outcast, which is to many of us the first attraction felt when we enter the world of the Russian mind.

The Russian is more acutely, more immediately conscious of the discord; so he is more acutely, more immediately conscious of the urgency of the question: Is there a harmony? Or, is there a God? This is the debate which, in a thousand forms, occupies the minds of the characters of Russian fiction: it is as absorbing in Tolstoy and Tchehov, in Turgenev even, as it is in Dostoevsky. It is more apparent in Russian literature than in English, but as I have tried to show, the debate is really just as essential to the highest English literature as it is to the Russian: the form of the debate is different, that is all.

However, in the work of Anton Tchehov the Russian genius has definitely carried the debate further than it was carried before. If the particular genius of Tchehov is

not, as indeed it is not, as great and commanding as that of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, it is perhaps more subtle. Tchehov begins, at least he begins that portion of his work which we can call characteristically his, with the unshakable conviction that there is no solution to the problem, there is no harmony. And he gives up beforehand the attempt to find one. What is more, in his work he deliberately concentrates upon human life in its least harmonious aspects. Where the discord is naked and most evidently beyond human resolution, there is the hand of Tchehov delicately revealing it, without a shadow of mitigation. In *The Dreary Story* the old Professor can only say, 'I don't know,' when Katy asks him what she is to do. She is broken and young; he is broken and old; he is too honest to deceive her. *The Black Monk* leads his victim to a beatific vision of the universe, to such an entrancing and celestial vision as was vouchsafed to Alyosha Karamazov, and behold! when his victim enters into his happiness, he falls on the floor dead: his dream was the dream of delirium. Or again in *The Lady with the Dog*, there is no way out for those hopeless, hapless lovers: they read their future in each other's eyes and acknowledge it: there is nothing to be done, nothing. And finally *The Cherry Orchard* falls to the inevitable axe; the sound of the axe-stroke echoes in our ears as the curtain falls on Firs, the old manservant, in the deserted house. They have forgotten him.

Harmony! When we first read Tchehov, the very word, the very idea, seems only a cruel joke of the power

which produced the consciousness of man to conceive it. We think, when we first read Tchehov, perhaps even more than when we read Hardy, of Hardy's bitter speculation 'whether man's consciousness was a mistake of God's.' We think that, I say, when we first read Tchehov, but only when we read him first. The second time our breath is caught with wonder. What is this strange magician doing to us; what spell has he cast upon our souls? Discord, the extreme of discord, and yet this music is divine. Fragments, a medley of fragments, yet this pattern is celestial. These fingers that only touch life to destroy it, bestow a breathless beauty on whatever they reveal. His extreme denial is an affirmation. There is no harmony, he cries, and the very sound of his voice echoes the music of the spheres.

Gentlemen, were I to confess the whole extent of my admiration of Anton Tchehov, I should be ashamed. It is an adoration. I know that he is not a great writer in the sense in which Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were. And yet I think he achieved a greater victory than they did. Tolstoy went out into the night: Dostoevsky left us half-finished a novel whose half is one of the two greatest novels in the world: Tchehov gave us *The Cherry Orchard*. And, for people like us, who can watch the struggles of heroes but cannot be heroes ourselves, Tchehov's was the most precious gift of all. Tolstoy set up his everlasting rest in a symbolic gesture; Dostoevsky said that men must be born again to see the world with the eyes of Alyosha. There is a harmony, perhaps, it may be so, they said: if

there is, or if there is not, the most terrible risk is worth taking in order that we may know. That was heroically said, and heroically done. Those were great voices that will sound on to the end of humanity. Tchehov's is only a whisper. But it whispers this: Perhaps—perhaps—the harmony is there, all the time. I have believed in nothing, I have trusted nothing, I have hoped for nothing—but yet—look,—look again.

You know *The Dreary Story*. It is perhaps the earliest of Tchehov's characteristic works. In it, he who was an amusing comic writer in the Russian *Punch*, suddenly became a magician. The old Professor and Katy meet for the last time: he tells the story himself.

> 'Only one word, only one word.' She weeps and stretches out her hands to me. 'What shall I do?'

But he cannot say: he turns the conversation. Katy gets up and, without looking at him, holds out her hands to him.

> 'I want to ask her: So it means you won't be at my funeral? But she does not look at me. Her hand is cold and like a stranger's. . . . I escort her to the door in silence. . . . She goes out of the room and walks down the long passage, without looking back. She knows that my eyes are following her, and probably on the landing she will look back. No, she has not looked back. The black dress has showed for the

last time, her steps are stilled. . . . Good-bye, my treasure!'

'Good-bye, my treasure!' There is the magic that makes a paradise of a desert of human hopes. We look again, we listen: yes, the harmony is there. And if the harmony is where Tchehov found it, then it is everywhere. He is, in the great company of men of genius, the latest-born. He comes, the youngest son, and there is no inheritance for him. The great estate of human life has been divided; so he goes off alone into the waste and desolate places, the dreary commonplace wilderness of the spirit, which are as like the wildernesses of the heroic writers, as the waste ground in a modern city is like the majestic jungles of the Amazon. Tchehov goes there, without hope, without belief; it is the last of all forlorn quests: and he brings back the Grail in his hands.

To my sense, Russian literature ends with Tchehov: he is the last great Russian writer; he is also the last great writer, for he belonged to a generation after the two great writers who are living with us still. He is the end of a period; and the new period has not yet begun, either in Russian literature or in European. We need not talk of Tchehov's secret; besides, it is much simpler to share in it by reading him. But we may take from his Notebooks a sentence which contains the mysterious accent of the last great voice of Russian literature. It chimes with the other voices; it is only different, simpler in some

ways, stranger in others, infinitely softer: strangest of all in its power of taking one utterly unawares.

Essentially all this is crude and meaningless, and romantic love appears as meaningless as an avalanche which involuntarily rolls down a mountain and overwhelms people. But when one listens to music, all this is—that some people lie in their graves and sleep, and that one woman is alive and, gray-haired, is now sitting in a box in the theatre, seems quiet and majestic, and the avalanche is no longer meaningless, since in nature everything has a meaning. And everything is forgiven, and it would be strange not to forgive.

[*November*, 1922.]

ANTON TCHEHOV

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For some reason or other it seems an incredibly bold thing to write a book about Tchehov. One would need in one's words the voice which Gorki said Tolstoy was wont to use when speaking of the beloved writer, a voice with some delicate, intimate modulation, with the quality of a caress. To be less than exquisitely true in one's appreciation of what he wrote and was holds the menace of complete disaster.

What is the cause of this strange and particular inhibition? Why this particular fear? The would-be critic thinks ahead and imagines his essay or his book before him. There in the midst of his own words is a paragraph of quotation, a sentence that might be taken from almost anywhere in Tchehov's works; and suddenly in the light of its rainbow radiance all that he himself has said appears fumbling and clumsy and vulgar. It is the menace of one's own self-revelation that is frightening.

To write about Tchehov is nothing less than an ordeal. One cannot hope to emerge from it unscathed. Mr. Gerhardi has not managed that.[1] But it is no small thing for any one who has felt within himself the subtle and secret spell of Tchehov to have the courage of the ordeal. It may be in Mr. Gerhardi's case partly the courage of youth; in another ten years, perhaps, when Tchehov might appear to him still wiser, still truer, and

[1] *Anton Tchehov.* By William Gerhardi. (Cobden-Sanderson.) 1923.

still nearer, his confidence might have failed him. He might then have been gently excruciated, as we are, by his juxtaposition of sentence after sentence from Mr. Wells's *The Undying Fire*, with sentence after sentence in which Tchehov has allowed his characters to declare his faith. Mr. Wells is a man of genius, but his genius is of another order than Tchehov's. Where Mr. Wells fumbles, Tchehov is certain; where Mr. Wells is crude, Tchehov is exquisite. To set them side by side is to deal unfairly by the one and to show a lack of understanding of the other, and all to no real purpose; for their faiths like their sensibilities are of a different kind.

Let us admit then that in such an attempt it was impossible for Mr. Gerhardi to avoid making us wince by touching upon a nerve occasionally; and let us remember that it is probably true that such a thing had to be done young or not at all. Then we can freely rejoice that the thing has been done; for it is certainly better that it should be done than left undone. Still, we have not yet touched even the fringe of the obdurate main question: Why do we feel this intimate and personal loyalty to Tchehov? Why is he set so close to our hearts that even the critic's minor misphrasings, even the choice of a mistaken word, should be felt as a physical pain? We try to think calmly. We are being ridiculous (we say to ourselves), foolishly hyper-sensitive. If any one were to make these small mistakes about Shakespeare, or Tolstoy, or Dickens, why, we should not care at all. But alas, the reply to this attempt at sober reasoning with ourselves

is simply that the argument is only too true. If it were Shakespeare, if it were Tolstoy, we certainly should not care; but it is Tchehov, and we do.

So in the last resort it seems that we are sensitive about Tchehov because he is a writer about whom, if we feel deeply at all, we feel in this intensely personal way. His case is unique. Our reaction, our queer desire to protect him from our own roughness, to save him from the coarseness of all critical approximation, at first appears to be quite independent of his greatness. He is not a Shakespeare; he is not a Tolstoy—never, in our wildest enthusiasm, have we made a mistake in proportion about him: somehow he does not invite such mistakes. And, after all, this period of 'wild enthusiasm' is a phrase, not a reality. There never was such a period. Our enthusiasm for Tchehov never grows, never diminishes: we take him into ourselves, and he is part of our lives for ever.

He is not great, we say, and then we wonder: whether it is not precisely because we feel him so near to us that we refuse him the name. We cannot tolerate that he should be removed from us to a mountain-top, and enveloped in a cloud. Perhaps it is not that he is not great, but that we cannot afford to let him be; and it may be that his greatness consists not least in this, that no writer of whom we know more obstinately avoided the attribute. Or we may put what is ultimately the same paradox in this way: Here is a writer who is more intimately dear to us than any other, whose truth is exactly our own truth, whom we do not have to interpret, for

whom we never at any moment have to make allowances; and yet his writing seems to us new, not new in parts and old in others, not new in method and old in substance, but simply and wholly new.

It is passing strange, this mystery of no mystery; and exceedingly hard to hold firm before the eye of the mind. There is no point on which to fix, no visible mark of joining between his world, his consciousness and ours. Tchehov calls for no efforts, demands no abjurations,—nothing of 'that willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith,' which was the inseparable condition of all literature before him. We have, it seems, only to open our eyes, and his world will be in front of us: we open them, and it is not there. If we are writers, we think for a vain moment of assimilating Tchehov's method—Mr. Gerhardi thinks of it—and the method slips through our fingers like quicksilver: we try to fix it, and we are left with a handful of airy negations—no plot, no ornament, no construction, no lies—and the smiling despair of this conclusion, that Tchehov wrote like Tchehov because he was Tchehov, and that if we want to write like him—and who would not?—we must *be* like him. To see his world is not, after all, merely a question of opening our eyes, but of opening other eyes than ours.

In Harnack's *History of the Western Church* is told the story—from which of the Fathers it comes we have forgotten—of a Christian who was haled before a Roman magistrate. The magistrate asked him how it was possible

for him to believe in such a simple religion—it was in the *very* early days of the Church—a creed so naked that it gave the mind nothing to take hold of, whereas the superb complications of Roman mythology offered an hand-hold to the least prehensile of minds. And the Christian answered that the secret of his faith was the mystery of simplicity—*mysterium simplicitatis*. This haunting Latin phrase, cavernous with spiritual profundity, yet in its whole effect so lucid and child-like, is the one we should choose if we were summoned to describe Tchehov's work in a word. He is still accused, as he was accused by Merezhkovsky thirty years ago, of writing about 'failures,' of being gray and depressing and painful; and it would be vain even to attempt to reply to a charge so manifestly based on insensitiveness to what he was, were it not that his own comment on the criticism has the luminous directness of the mysterious simplicity that was his. 'One would need to be God,' he said, 'to decide which are the failures and which are the successes in life.' And when we read that, we suddenly remember that the great Tacitus had no doubt to which class belonged the fellow of the name of Christ.

Most of all, it is this quality of mysterious simplicity in Tchehov's presentation of life which first prevents us from regarding the depths of understanding below. It is as though he understood not only that life was so, but also that it must be so; as though he knew a secret. And the secret, as all true secrets must be, is very, very simple, so simple that we cannot recognise it; we can recognise

only a strange enchantment in what he shows us, a strange and haunting quality in his words. We look and listen, and we feel that we are trembling on the brink of knowledge so incredible that it cannot be. We do not know what to say; we cannot understand what is happening in ourselves; we are overwhelmed by a single feeling, which when we try to hold it before our eyes, splinters like light through a crystal into contradictory emotions: laughter, tears, pity, love, and one knows not what infinite and unfamiliar tenderness from our depths. Yet these are blended and made one by a kind of sacramental solemnity: we have been made partakers of a mystery. And Tchehov works this magic on our souls again and again and again. We could choose the endings of twenty of his stories, quote sentences by the hundred from them, in which, with no essential diminution through the veil of a foreign language, the miracle is accomplished. For a single instance, take the ending of *The Lady with the Dog:*

> Then they spent a long while taking counsel together, talked of how to avoid the necessity of secrecy, of deception, of living in different towns and not seeing each other for long at a time. How could they be free from this intolerable bondage?
>
> 'How? How?' he asked, clutching his head. 'How?'
>
> And it seemed as though in a little while the solution would be found, and then a new and splendid life would begin; and it was clear to them both that they

still had a long, long way to go, and that the most complicated and difficult part of it was only just beginning.

The response which that awakens within us is an inaudible *Nunc dimittis* set to some new and unknown melody. We are grave, we are quiet, we are gathered to ourselves; for our eyes have seen, and our hearts have understood, a mystery.

That which Tchehov makes us feel, he felt: we cannot maintain the vision, but he could: what is a miracle to us was to him a faculty of nature. He saw what seem to our bewildered eyes immeasurably complicated and subtle things *sub specie simplicitatis*. From where he stood life was—exactly what life is, yet it was one. He did not need to exclude anything; not a single one of the thousand seemingly insoluble discords which in our lives we know had to be set aside and ignored by him. On the contrary, where the discord is at extremity and the tangle most obviously beyond all solution this side the grave, to that point before all others he turns: and lo! the harmony is there. In our everyday language, in the framework of our everyday belief, the situation in *The Lady with the Dog* would be to some impossible, to others immoral, to both, manifestly intolerable and beyond all human remedy. 'Look again,' Tchehov seems to whisper; we look, and everything is transfigured. There is only one gesture for us, if we have eyes to see—to bow our heads, in the knowledge that it must be so and not otherwise.

There are dangers in this word simplicity. It seems that few people understand (or if many understand, few remember) that there are two kinds of spiritual simplicity. There is the simplicity of the child, and the simplicity of the man: the one comes before the great struggle of self-discovery begins, the other when it is ended. There is the simplicity of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the simplicity of *The Tempest;* of birth, and of rebirth. And our language is still so far from a final perfection that we are compelled to use one name for both, or to describe the second condition by metaphors taken from the first. The simplicity of Tchehov is very wise and very old; it is an achievement wrung out of much knowledge and surpassing inward honesty. Tchehov began to learn very early in his life: at a time when most Englishmen are still schoolboys he had learned not only to bear but to accept an overwhelming burden of responsibility. Read the letter to his brother which he wrote when he was only twenty-six:[1] it is an incredible document, for it contains the humanity and the wisdom and the humour which even men of genius are not wont to acquire till they are old. And this personal heritage of experience, important though it was, is less important than his impersonal inheritance of the great explorations of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, who had brought the European consciousness to a verge. There was nothing for it, if Tchehov was to *be* at all, but to be a new man.

[1]Or one, even more remarkable, because written when he was twenty-three, in *The Adelphi*, June, 1924.

And that is what we feel he was. Those amazing letters of his which come so near to us, are simple and strange in a new way; they seem to us perfectly natural, more natural than any letters we have ever read, yet they are quite unlike any other letters we have read; they belong to a different kind, they are informed by a new consciousness. They are simple, the attitude of which they are the natural product is simple, but we sense in that simplicity a complete knowledge of all the complexities with which the modern consciousness is laden. Tchehov had somehow passed beyond all this. Mr. Gerhardi's instinct is right when he protests against the attitude of those who regard a Marcel Proust or a James Joyce as the advanced outposts of the literary consciousness to-day. Tchehov is far in advance of them; by his side they are curious antiquarian survivals of a superseded past. Tchehov's work is indeed a resolution of their illimitable intellectualisms. His simplicity completely undercuts their complexities.

For Tchehov knew where the intellectual consciousness was impotent; and he knew it was impotent precisely for the apprehension of the eternal livingness of life. Entangled in the maze of complicated accidents, it misses the essence. In *The Duel*, von Koren gropes in vain after some understanding of the impossible Laevsky, until at the last the rigidity of his honest mind is melted by a simple intuition into the nature of Laevsky's being; and the reconciliation which ensues is as profound as any

of the more striking reconciliations in which the great drama of old used to culminate. For Tchehov, who preached nothing deliberately, in reality preached no less than this: a reconciliation here and now, achieved by an understanding not from the mind, but from the soul, or more truly from a reborn soul. And, as though expressly for our illumination, Tchehov in his Notebooks isolated the quintessence of the reconciliation which is his.

> Essentially all this is crude and meaningless, and romantic love appears as meaningless as an avalanche which involuntarily rolls down a mountain and overwhelms people. But when one listens to music, all this is—that some people lie in their graves and sleep, and that one woman is alive and, gray-headed, is now sitting in a box in the theatre, seems quiet and majestic, and the avalanche is no longer meaningless, since in nature everything has a meaning. And everything is forgiven, and it would be strange not to forgive.

This condition which Tchehov experienced when he listened to music, we experience when we listen to Tchehov. It would be not possible, not inhuman, not stupid, but simply strange not to forgive. This forgiveness is not the result of an effort; indeed it is not what we understand by forgiveness at all; the name has been carried from the past to define a new condition of the consciousness. If one were truly conscious of some

fundamental harmony, if one steadily knew that everything had a meaning, then forgiveness and unforgivingness would have none: for they have meaning only in a world which is ignorant of its own.

And here, perhaps, we come nearest to the newness of Tchehov. What in other men would be some kind of intermittent and bewildering mystical perception, in him was a steady mode of apprehension; and because it was that, it seems extraordinarily simple and intangible. He makes no claim for himself: he is perfectly ready to admit that he is 'lemonade' compared to the strong drink of the great men before him, or that they had purposes—'axes to grind'—and he has none. Yet imperceptibly we realise (more with our hearts than our heads) that he is single as those great men never were single; he was harmonious, where they were still divided; he did not have to struggle his life long to forgive, he forgave. Yet so soon as we begin to use these ambitious phrases, we are afraid. He, who knew so much, whose writing was so incomparably subtle, who when we try to analyse him becomes so complex, in reality astonishes us by the impression of his simplicity. And it may be that, after all, the truest description of him is the most elementary: that he was a different *kind* of man. It happens with us in regard to Tchehov, as it happened with the man in his story, *The Wife*, in regard to the doctor.

> I listened to the doctor, and, according to my habit, applied my usual measures to him—materialist,

> idealist, money-grubber, herd-instincts, and so forth, but not a single one of my measures would fit even approximately; and, curiously, while I only listened to him and looked at him, he was, as a man, perfectly clear to me, but the moment I began applying my measures to him he became, despite all his sincerity and simplicity, an extraordinarily complex, confused, and inexplicable nature.

And nothing could, in fact, be simpler in itself and in its manifestations than this new consciousness of Tchehov's. There are in his letters, for instance, hardly any 'profound thoughts,' and yet the most trivial incident recorded in them seems to have a profound importance; if he makes a joke, we feel that nobody ever made a joke like that before. It is not in the least, as he sometimes pretends, that he is too trivial to pay attention to the deep speculations and debates of the *intelligentsia*, or that he is one of those would-be hierophants who reduce life to terms of some undifferentiated origin out of which life has differentiated itself. He accepts all the complexities, he sacrifices nothing; he simply makes us feel that everything has a meaning, and that he knows it. Of course, he cannot tell us the meaning: no man will ever be able to do that, for knowledge of meaning can only come with a change in the nature of consciousness.

The more we try to make clear to ourselves the unique and essential reality of Tchehov, the more inevitable appears the conclusion that some such prophetic change

had actually occurred in him, so that he saw things with some simple and direct apprehension of their nature, of which we can recognise the truth though the process eludes us. The transparent simplicity of his descriptions of things which to other minds are intricate and complicated is disconcerting. He wants to show that a man is in love with his wife: this is how he does it:

> That which in her words was just, seemed to him uncommon, extraordinary; and that which differed from his own convictions was, in his view, naïve and touching.

Astonishing effects achieved by simple means have always been the prerogative of the finest art; but these effects of Tchehov's are different from those attained before him. They do not make the impression of flashes of incredible intuition, and far less of some superhuman gift of creation, but of some quite human faculty of knowledge which unfortunately we do not possess. The illumination is so steady and unemphatic that at first it often escapes us altogether; then comes a period when we do notice it and put it down to some sort of deliberate method employed by Tchehov—Mr. Gerhardi shows some of the signs of this period—but finally we are forced to the conclusion that it was a natural function of Tchehov's consciousness, and his consciousness a natural function of his being. Tchehov does not insist, but his lack of insistence comes not from a deliberate artistic

purpose, but by nature. He is not resisting a temptation—as we feel Flaubert is resisting a temptation in, for instance, *Un Cœur Simple*—he is merely expressing a vision and stating a knowledge which are natural to him. In his world it would be as strange to insist as it would be strange not to forgive.

It seems that at this point we begin to touch the secret of the intense and sensitive personal loyalty which Tchehov's admirers feel towards him. Much more immediately than in the case of any other writer all that he wrote appears to us as a function of all that he was. It is not easy to explain why the closeness of the relation between his seeing and his being should be so striking, or so unmistakably acknowledged by us. We have and know the Letters and the Notebooks, it is true, and these are, more than such things are wont to be, of one piece with his stories and plays; but that is not the cause. We knew the connection long before the Letters and the Notebooks were revealed to us. The cause is rather that, if we leave aside a few comic stories of his nonage, there is an all-pervading unity in his work. There is a point in his too brief life (and it occurs unbelievably early) after which there is no perceptible evolution in his work, and above all no perceptible struggle. Suddenly he is mature, and he remains mature; and it becomes almost impossible to say that one piece of work is better than another. At most, we can have personal and irrational preferences. Every story, every play, every letter, after this moment, is new; but all alike belong to the same order.

There was a moment when Tchehov possessed his knowledge and possessed himself in a new way.

But why, it may be asked, because he possessed his knowledge did he necessarily possess himself? There are two answers: one, that knowledge of this kind cannot be achieved without possession of oneself: that sounds almost mystical. Therefore it is better to insist on the second, which is, that if the knowledge of the writer—and by knowledge we mean his comprehension of life—outstrips his own inward development, no power on earth can conceal the traces of the conflict and contradiction in his work. In Tchehov's work these traces are invisible; instead his powers are steady and equable; there is neither sign of disturbance nor evidence of hesitation. As is the work, so is the man: the work is new and true, the man also.

If we could know the process of this inward development in Tchehov, we should know something of infinite value to humanity. But like all things of the highest spiritual value, it cannot be *known*; if it were put into words we should not understand them, any more than we understand the words into which still greater souls than Tchehov have put their secret. Moreover, Tchehov was reticent about it. Practically all we have is a letter he wrote when he was twenty-eight to Suvorin (in 1888) soon after his play *Ivanov* had drawn upon him the attention of Russia. He is speaking of the play:

> As far as my design does, I was on the right track,

but the execution is good for nothing. I ought to have waited! I am glad I did not listen to Grigorovich two or three years ago, and write a novel! I can just imagine what a lot of good material I should have spoiled. He says: 'Talent and freshness overcome everything.' It is truer to say that talent and freshness can spoil a great deal. In addition to plenty of material and talent, one wants something else which is no less important. One wants to be mature—that is one thing; and for another *the feeling of personal freedom* is essential, and that feeling has only recently begun to develop in me. I used not to have it before; its place was successfully filled by my frivolity, carelessness, and lack of respect for my work. What writers belonging to the upper class have received by nature for nothing, plebeians acquire at the cost of their youth.

It was Tchehov himself who underlined the words: 'the feeling of personal freedom.' Of course, it is a mere momentary fancy of his that personal freedom of the kind he means is the gift of nature to the aristocrat. It is something which no man has by nature, and very few, be they aristocrats or plebeians, achieve at all: it is a sense of one's own personal existence and validity independent of all circumstance: it is the profoundest of all kinds of self-knowledge, and no one can receive it without paying the full price. Tchehov leaves us in no doubt what he meant if we read his letters carefully. 'I believe,' he wrote elsewhere, 'in individual people, I see salvation in individual

personalities scattered here and there all over Russia—whether they belong to the intelligentsia or to the peasants—they are strong though they are few.' For this feeling of personal freedom of which he knew the importance and the cost is the mark of the true and completed individuality, the sign of independent self-existence. Such individuals are the pioneers of humanity, and on them the future of true civilisation does indeed depend. At another time, also in a letter to Suvorin, Tchehov described the process as 'squeezing the slave out of oneself.'

> Write a story (he says) of how a young man, the son of a serf, who has served in a shop, sung in a choir, been at a high school and a university, who has been brought up to respect every one of higher rank and position, to kiss priests' hands, to reverence other people's ideas, to be thankful for every morsel of bread, who has been many times whipped, who has trudged from one pupil to another without goloshes, who has been used to fighting, and tormenting animals, who has liked dining with his rich relations, and been hypocritical before God and men from the mere consciousness of his own insignificance—write how this young man squeezes the slave out of himself, drop by drop, and how waking one beautiful morning he feels that he has no longer a slave's blood in his veins, but a real man's.

Tchehov states it so unobtrusively that we may easily

pass it by, and even if we notice it, may forget how vital this inward achievement was to his real maturity as a writer.

So vital indeed that the truest of all his brief definitions of his writing would be that it is the writing of a perfectly free man: a man who has freed himself from all fears and has found that within himself which enables him to stand completely alone. When a man has attained this freedom and unity in himself, he does not need to send his intellect any more on fruitless expeditions after meanings: somehow he knows the meaning. And such a man can afford to love humanity as Tchehov loved it, for he is in no danger of entanglement; he does not love for the sake of being loved. And the knowledge of a free man is steady and unfaltering—a possession for ever—because there is, in that which knows, no variableness, neither any shadow of turning.

We catch a glimpse of Tchehov's secret; we cannot know it wholly: if we did, we should be like him, and to be like him would be to be far in advance of what we are. But in so far as we do understand what he wrote and was, and have a sense of the simple unity of his seeing and his being, we are not surprised that Tchehov's method has found so few followers, nor do we wonder why the one conspicuous attempt to imitate him (in Mr. Shaw's *Heartbreak House*) is merely a revelation of a strange insensibility in Mr. Shaw, or why the juxtaposition of Mr. Wells's declarations of faith with Tchehov's is impossible; nor are we any longer perplexed for the

reason why we feel an intense and unique loyalty to a writer whom most of us know only in translation: for we know that Tchehov made himself a new man by a great spiritual victory, that a kindred victory in ourselves is the condition of using his method, and that the victory, like all victories of this high kind, was won on our behalf.

[*November*, 1923.]

GOGOL

'We all,' wrote Dostoevsky, 'come out from under Gogol's "Overcoat".' This derivation of one of the great literatures of the world from a young man's single story—*The Overcoat* was written in Gogol's early twenties—is easier to appreciate than to define. Over and over again in reading *The Overcoat* we come upon sentences and paragraphs in which we feel as it were a new life stirring, the birth of a new sensitiveness to human experience. The range of man's responsiveness is being definitely extended.

This sense of new possibilities that he gives us is Gogol's great fascination. Old limitations are breaking down; the face-to-face vision of eighteenth-century 'common sense' is giving way not so much to a new method as to the potentiality of many new methods. Gogol now looks more intently at what is before him, now he glances altogether sideways. His scrutiny is, sometimes more microscopic, sometimes more fantastic than that of his predecessors in his own country and abroad. He looks harder, and he looks from a different direction. But indeed he glances rather than looks. He opens the new window just long enough for the vision to excite us; then he turns abruptly aside and opens another. We have not time to see the whole world as we do through the eyes of the greatest, but we have many glimpses. They are unsettling, for Gogol's eyes are restless. We feel that he is being driven on by a greater power: he has

no time to pause. On this side and that he leads us to a brink and turns abruptly away. He sets our imaginations racing and pulls them up short at the crucial leap. What he does to us must in some sort have happened to himself, so that we might describe him also as the man of a racing imagination. And the moment we have written those words we remember the strange description of the racing troika with which *Dead Souls* rushes to its illimitable end.

Gogol's work is essentially incomplete; because of that it is the more exciting, so exciting in its peculiar way that we can not only see the Russian literature we know springing out of its beginnings, but we have glimpses also of a literature which not even the Russians have achieved. There is what we can only call a 'mad' streak in Gogol; and madness, applied to the human imagination, is an unsatisfactory term, the more unsatisfactory since we are using it to define a queer imaginative tempo in Gogol by which the first things at moments are brought perilously near to the last. It might be argued that Dostoevsky himself followed this particular road of Gogol's opening to the bitter end. But there is, or there seems to be, a real difference between them. The 'mad' element in Gogol's vision is not an inevitable extension of the intellectual and the speculative, as it is in Dostoevsky. Gogol's is not a mind considering the problem of evil and pain with an implacable imaginative logic. The tremendous discipline of Dostoevsky is not his at all. Gogol's phantasmagoric vision is more immediate and more primitive. When

things and creatures begin to loom before his mind they are not embodied principles; they are more elemental. They are grotesque and gigantic and comic; they are terrifying also.

The more we feel that Dostoevsky's sentence concerning the derivation of Russian literature from *The Overcoat* is true, the more definitely we feel that the seeds contained in certain pages of *Dead Souls* and in such an extraordinary story as *The Nose*, did not come to fruition. These possibilities were never fulfilled. Perhaps they never could have been; perhaps, in fact, they are not there. But so much undoubtedly was there that it is wiser to allow the benefit of the doubt. *The Nose*, for instance, persists in appearing as something more than a rather crude comic fantasia. Major Kovalyov's nose suddenly turns up in the middle of a loaf of bread. Major Kovalyov as suddenly finds that his nose has disappeared leaving a space 'as smooth as a pancake.' The barber into whose breakfast loaf it has smuggled wraps it up in a parcel which he finds it very hard to dispose of. Even when Major Kovalyov goes to the newspaper office to advertise for his missing nose, and is taken aback at being told that such an advertisement cannot possibly be accepted, the story remains within the limits of an excellent fantastic invention. But when the Major, with his face muffled, stops 'as though rooted to the spot before the door of a house,' the 'mad' streak is suddenly visible.

Something inexplicable took place before his eyes:

> a carriage was stopping at the entrance; the carriage door flew open; a gentleman in uniform, bending down, sprang out and ran up the steps. What was the horror and at the same time the amazement of Kovalyov when he recognised that this was his own nose!

The effect which this makes in its place and context, upon one mind at least, is queer indeed. It is, perhaps, only an Aristophanic invention, but it is so curiously sinister. The last thing we feel inclined to do is to laugh, it should, it *ought* to, be uproariously funny; but it is not funny in the least. It is impressive, indeed, but in quite another way. And this, after all, is only a single instance, and in some respects rather a crude one, of a kind of vision which is continually manifesting itself in Gogol, and is invariably disconcerting when it does.

Again, consider the tailor's toe-nail in *The Overcoat*. It sticks in the mind first because there is another famous toe-nail in Russian literature. It belonged to Dmitri Karamazov, who gazed at it with a disgusted fascination when he was arrested at Mokroe. One wonders whether Dostoevsky had a sub-conscious memory of Gogol. But they are very different toe-nails. That of Gogol's tailor was almost a thing-in-itself. It had no relation to Akaky Akakievitch's consciousness, as Dmitri's had to his.

> The feet, as is usual with tailors when they sit at work, were bare; and the first object that caught Akaky Akakievitch's eye was the big toe, with which

> he was already familiar, with a misshapen nail as thick and as strong as the shell of a tortoise.

That is all; but it is surprising and more than a little frightening to discover how monstrous that toe-nail is, and how monstrously it abides in the memory. It dwarfs the tailor and his room.

But this was not the Gogol from whom Russian literature descended. This is the Gogol of the most disturbing parts of *Dead Souls*, and not of *The Overcoat*, even though the toe-nail comes in that story, simply because Gogol found it impossible to be only one thing at a time. After all, he was Gogol, and not, save for the purposes of literary history (which are always laudable but never essential), the original germ of Russian literature. *The Overcoat* itself which is in this historical context a 'realistic' story, telling of the disaster of a creature 'whose cause no one had championed, who was dear to no one, of interest to no one, who never even attracted the attention of the student of natural history,' is in right of its own reality something different. That is quite clear from the fact that there is plenty of room in it for the ghost of the dead Akaky Akakievitch, who, with scant courtesy and a total forgetfulness of what was due to a general, roughly pulled off the overcoat of the civil councillor who had refused to help him in his search for the overcoat he had lost. That unseemly ghost is not at all discordant in Gogol's own story; but he had no place in the literature which derived from it. Ivan Karamazov's Devil, Kolya's

Black Monk, are quite another kettle of fish. Gogol's ghost was just a ghost; Dostoevsky's and Tchehov's were projections of a consciousness.

Russian literature took what it wanted from Gogol, and it did not want the whole of him. It is hard to say quite how central to Gogol was the part it took. Probably the pound of flesh was pretty near the heart; but it was on one side of it, and there were other sides. Nevertheless, in the description of Akaky Akakievitch at his work as copying-clerk, we can hear not merely faint intimations of the note which was to be sounded, but the very voice itself. This speech is unmistakable:

> The young clerks jeered and made jokes at him to the best of their clerkly wit, and told before his face all sorts of stories of their own invention about him; they would say of his landlady, an old woman of seventy, that she beat him, would inquire when the wedding was to take place, and would scatter bits of paper on his head, calling them snow. . . . Only when the the jokes were too unbearable, when they jolted his arm and prevented him from going on with his work, he would bring out: 'Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?' And there was something strange in the words and in the voice in which they were uttered. There was a note in it of something that aroused compassion, so that one young man, new to the office, who, following the example of the rest, had allowed himself to mock at him, suddenly stopped as though

> cut to the heart, and from that time forth everything was, as it were, changed, and appeared in a different light to him. Some unnatural force seemed to thrust him away from the companions with whom he had become acquainted, accepting them as well-bred, polished people. And long afterwards, at moments of the greatest gaiety, the figure of the humble little clerk with the bald patch on his head rose before him with his heart-rending words: 'Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?' And in those heart-rending words he heard others: 'I am your brother.'

Perhaps not the whole of Russian literature can be derived from that, but the whole of Dostoevsky can. And probably that is what Dostoevsky really meant.

[*September*, 1923.]

ENGLISH POETRY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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In a famous passage, Matthew Arnold assured us that we should not improve on the classification of poetry which the Greeks adopted, and that their categories of epic, dramatic, lyric, and so forth, 'had a natural propriety and should be adhered to.'

> It may (he admitted) sometimes seem doubtful to which of two categories a poem belongs; whether this or that poem is to be called, for instance, narrative or lyric, lyric or elegiac. But there is to be found in every good poem a strain, a predominant note, which determines the poem as belonging to one of these kinds rather than another; and here is the best proof of the value of the classification and of the advantage of adhering to it.

No doubt, we are inclined to reply, it is the best proof, if it is true. But are there in fact these strains, these predominant notes, which are so decisive? What, for instance, is the predominant and determining note in the *Divina Commedia*? Is not the truth rather that classification of the Greeks was really formal, but that with them a classification of poetry by form had some bearing upon content, because the forms for certain contents were fixed by convention? With us, on the other hand, a constant relation between poetical form and poetical

content does not exist, and for this reason it may be not only burdensome, but even hazardous and uncritical, for us to preserve a classification based upon qualities that are no longer essential.

Certainly it is true that some of these traditional categories are used at the present time with an extreme ambiguity. We imagine we know a dramatic poem when we see one; it is a play in verse. But we have no hesitation in calling a narrative poem dramatic, if its quality seems to demand the epithet. *King Lear* is dramatic by virtue of its form; *Lamia* by virtue of its content. And Matthew Arnold himself, by urging us to look for 'a strain, a predominant note'—that is, a quality not of the form, but of the content alone—destroyed the very basis of the classification he recommended. If we are to classify by content, we had better not use epithets of form: if we do not use them—and the tradition is almost compulsory—we shall need to have our best wits about us if we are to avoid confusions.

In spite of the strength of the tradition, it is, however, noticeable that the old classification has, in the actual practice of modern criticism, been largely discarded. It has fallen into abeyance, because it no longer gave any help in the work of distinction. A modern critic does not occupy himself with wondering whether a poem is dramatic, or epic, or narrative, or lyric; he is concerned only to discover whether it is poetry. *Hoc opus, hic labor est.* If, in his unguarded moments, he lets fall the phrase 'lyrical quality,' the phrase itself is enough to show that

he is describing an essence, not a form. And it is a thousand to one that the phrase, as he uses it, is simply synonymous with 'poetical quality.' At all events, he is quite as ready to attribute 'lyrical quality' to a dramatic or narrative poem as he is to deny it to a lyric.

The word 'lyric,' indeed, as a description of the formal qualities of a poem, is no longer of any use to us. It no longer implies, as once it did, that the poem was written for music; it means hardly more than that the poem is a short one, and that it is not a sonnet. But lyrical as an epithet of essential quality is much more alluring as an object of analysis. Moreover, it calls urgently for examination. For it is at once vague and significant. When we have said that a poem has 'the true lyrical quality,' we feel that we have said something important about it. We have decided that it is a poem.

In our more ruthless moments we may go on to declare that a poem which lacks this quality is not a poem at all. It may be eloquent, brilliant, witty, musical; but it lacks the finest poetic vitality, and is therefore not a poem. The method, though attractive, is too arbitrary; for, even if we admit that 'lyrical' is the commonest name for the highest and most essential quality of poetry, there is still no reason why a poem from which this is absent should not be a poem. The house of poetry contains many mansions. We must be content with saying that the truest and most indisputable poetry, the poetry which we could least afford to lose, the poetry which seems to illuminate our human universe with a gleam of a purer

existence and a fuller knowledge than our own, is lyrical. Lyrical is simply the name by which we distinguish its peculiar quality and power.

Can we go further than this? Or must we remain on the brink of knowledge with the dubious divining-rod of the *je ne sais quoi* in our hands?

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* of Ludwig Wittgenstein, which is one of the most curious, most stringent, and most stimulating pieces of modern philosophical writing that I know, contains a simple sentence which has much bearing on our question. Though its full implications can appear only when it is understood as a link in a delicate and subtle chain of analytical reasoning, it may yet be separated from it to our advantage. 'Everything that can be thought,' says the young Austrian philosopher, 'can be thought clearly; everything that can be said, can be said clearly.' And again, 'What can be shown, cannot be said.' At first sight these are the sentences of a rationalist among the rationalists. But even without our knowledge that their author is a mystic, a little thought upon them reveals unexpected implications. Can what is thought in the highest poetry be thought clearly, or what is said by it be said clearly? It cannot be thought otherwise; it cannot be said otherwise: so much we know. The knowledge is, indeed, part of our recognition of its quality. But that it cannot be thought or said otherwise is far different from its being thought and said clearly. We know it is not; we know it cannot be. We know that what is clearly thought and said in the greatest

poetry has so little to do with its own deepest import that it is negligible in comparison with it. We feel that this quintessential poetry could, indeed, be defined as the result of an effort to bring unthinkable thoughts and unsayable sayings within the range of human minds and ears.

And this mystical poetic truth is, in reality, by no means as recondite as it seems. All that is, even to the most rationalistic among us, of vital importance in our pedestrian little lives, is unthinkable by our thought, and unspeakable by our speech. What man has ever said to the woman of his choice, 'I love you,' without the instant knowledge that the words—his best, his truest, and his simplest words—were almost a vain and barren parody of what he intended and what he knew? Or what man, having convinced his intellect that he is what he is 'by some mechanic laws,' and that the constitution of the universe and not himself is responsible for his being and his acts, has freed himself thereby from the ineluctable sense of sin, a secret knowledge that he cannot think or utter? Or again, and as it were from the other side, what man can think or speak the meaning of the one word, 'forgiveness.' It is a mystery that he knows within himself fully or not at all. It may be revealed to him by the parable of the Lost Sheep or the Prodigal Son; but it is not thought or spoken there. It *is* revealed. 'What can be shown, cannot be said.'

'Ethics,' says Wittgenstein elsewhere, 'is transcendental. Ethics and æsthetics are one.' These familiar examples

of the mysteries of life as it comes to each one of us, are in sober truth, also examples of the mystery of poetry. It lies in the very heart of the nature of all great poetry—of all great art whatsoever—that it should reveal to us directly a kind of existence of which the thinking of our mundane minds has no inkling. It is the secret kingdom out of which Anton Tchehov one day bore away a mysterious and authentic law; it is the realm 'where everything is forgiven, and it would be *strange* not to forgive.' In that sentence, beyond doubt, is a star dropped out from the Kingdom of Heaven which is within us. And the direct intuition which tells us that that star fell from the same heaven as the lines of great poetry, the themes of great music, among which we store it, tells us also that art and morality are one.

But that profound truth, which perhaps ought not to be casually presented for fear of misunderstanding, is relevant now only in so far as it throws a light upon the nature of that poetry which, wherever we find it, we call lyrical. It is the revelation of another kingdom. That another kingdom exists may be proved by any one who will look into the reality of his own being. That the kingdom he finds there is the same that the poets reveal to us—of that there may, indeed, be no proof, for no proof is needed. To argue with those who have not, because they do not choose to have, experience of them, is idle and sterile disputation.

It is in the nature of things that these revelations of another kingdom or another plane of being through

poetry should be intermittent in the history of poetry. After all, poetry is but one of the arts of literature, and literature is but one of the arts, and the arts themselves are but one means of attaining this revelation. There may be periods when the human spirit seeks it by the way of religious devotion; and certainly it would be generally true to say that the great efflorescence of the arts in the West which seems now to have reached its decline began to unfold itself as mediæval Christianity began to wither. There may also be periods when, for some profound cause, humanity cares for none of these things. The eighteenth century seems to have been such a period. During it the minds of men appear to have been occupied with the work of liberating the individual from what he felt to be the bondage of tradition. Now, across the distance of a separating century, we can see that the task of asserting the complete independence of man was necessary in order that he should learn by bitter experience that it is not possible for him to live in complete and conscious independence, and that, if he could not endure the restraint of a tradition which seemed to him lifeless and untrue, he must dig down into himself for a new one. That was Rousseau's great work. He discovered that the new tradition was not unlike the old. The reality in both was the same; but in the old it had been hidden, in the new it shone with all the golden light of personal discovery.

To treat of the history of lyrical poetry in such a period is therefore, in a sense, to treat of the thing which

is not. So long as the human mind insists on a complete and conscious mastery of its own destiny, lyrical poetry (considered, as we have tried to consider it, as essence and not as form) can scarcely begin to be. It demands for its own birth an admission of that which is beyond reason; its very roots lie in the unthinkable and unspeakable. Of such an admission the eighteenth century was afraid; and rightly afraid, because the force and import of its ultimate admission was to depend upon its having been wrung from it. Pending its final enforced surrender, the duty of the century was to hold the fort of reason to the last, and to insist that literature should express itself in rational propositions. The unthinkable was madness; the unspeakable, inhuman. Only a later generation was to begin the gradual work of discovery that they are the sanest and most human of all.

In so far, then, as the latest historian of English poetry in the eighteenth century[1] is dealing with the realities and not the surface of his subject, his story should be of the suffering and discomfiture of those prematurely born souls who, living among the defenders of the fortress of reason and self-sufficiency, were at heart disloyal because of their premonition that the defence was vain. They had come to learn that man cannot live by bread alone; they were torn by unthinkable thoughts, unspeakable words groped for utterance within them. It is the great merit of Mr. Doughty's narrative that amid the waste of poetic

[1] *English Lyrical Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*. By Oswald Doughty. (O'Connor.)

futility which he is compelled to include, out of reverence for the formal meaning of the word 'lyrical,' he does make a serious and on the whole a successful attempt to follow the shining thread of this poignant and living story. Collins, Smart, Chatterton, Cowper, Gray—of these five, in whose poetry there is something more than a fleeting glimpse of a reality beyond the actual, one killed himself, and three died melancholy-mad. Only Gray managed to maintain himself against what Dr. Johnson called 'that hunger of the imagination which preys upon life.' Thomson, also, who was to some degree the father of them all, preserved himself; but in him the quality we seek is vague and diffused. We are more at ease in denying its absence than in asserting its presence in his poetry.

But the human tragedy of the story, grievous though it is, can be regarded only as a sign, which he who runs may read, of the struggle which vexed the soul of the age of Reason. We do not know enough of the victims to follow their vicissitudes. What do we know of Collins, of Smart, of Chatterton? Even their names seem to have survived only by accident. It is as though the age itself, resolute to preserve its appearance of rational calm, had swept away all trace of its poets, as a man puts away an importunate thought. And they themselves become almost wholly the creatures of our theories and imaginations. We imagine them as men compelled by circumstance to mistrust the gleam they saw, and, mistrusting, to have been denied a fuller vision. It takes a superhuman bravery to believe a faith discovered in utter

isolation. Wordsworth had Coleridge; they both had Southey; and all had Rousseau before them. Rousseau had no one, but in a measure he had Europe. But Collins and Smart and Chatterton were truly alone. We cannot wonder that they dared no more; the wonder is rather that they should have dared so much, in the face of universal ridicule or universal neglect.

If we regard, as we must, Collins and Gray as the most intellectually conscious of those eighteenth-century poets who were troubled by a glimpse of the brave, translunary things, we may look in them for some indication of the poet's own feeling towards his own discomfiture. It was, in both these men, as we might expect, a sense of lack rather than a sense of gift by which they knew themselves poets. Collins, as he timidly reveals himself in his work, was one who knew what true poetry was, but knew not how to attain it. He invokes the Passions to his aid, he implores the help of Simplicity:

> Faints the cold work till thou inspire the whole—

but he implores her in vain. We know that it was not wholly in vain; but to Collins himself it must have seemed that the gods had denied him their most precious gift. And Gray, who lived longer, only lived to feel the same lack more keenly. Writing to Mason in 1756 at the age of forty, he had said:

> The true lyric style, with all its flights of fancy,

ornaments, heightening of expression and harmony of sound, is in its nature superior to every other style.

Though we must not bear too hardly upon the diction of a past age, we cannot help remarking the externality of the approach. Lyric is for Gray in this letter a manner rather than a quality. It is a manner which, being the most superior manner, Gray intends to adopt, to 'go in for,' with no apparent sense of misgiving. Eleven years later (in 1767), as he had come sensibly nearer to a true knowledge of the subject, he had reached a consciousness of his own failure to achieve it:

> Extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous, and musical, is one of the grand beauties of lyric poetry; this I have always aimed at and never could attain.

He, also, did for a moment attain it, though not so unequivocally as Collins; and he attained it most memorably in his lament for the decay of poetry.

> Woods that wave o'er Delphi's steep,
> Isles that crown the Ægean deep,
> Fields that cool Ilissus laves,
> Or where Mæander's amber waves
> In lingering labyrinths creep;
> How do your tuneful voices languish
> Mute, but to the voice of anguish?

In those beautiful lines are revealed the two sources from which Collins and Gray sought the quality they were so conscious of lacking. They turned to Greek, and they turned to Milton, as the chief inheritor of the classical tradition in England. Gray's second description of lyrical poetry fits no English poet so well as him who —

> Rode sublime
> Upon the seraph wings of Ecstasy
> The secrets of the abyss to spy;

and the intimate connection between Collins's regretful odes to Simplicity and the Passions, and the famous Miltonic definition of poetry as 'simple, sensuous, and passionate' leaps to the eye.

Impassioned simplicity, then, was what they lacked and sought. And perhaps no single descriptive phrase suggests the quality of true lyric better than this one, which we may call, by adoption, theirs. But whence was impassioned simplicity to come? Submission to influences, even the finest, or the gradual discipline of taste are powerless to achieve this end. There is far more 'impassioned simplicity' in the 'barbaric' Whitman than in all the English poetry of the eighteenth century before Blake. For the end they sought a faith is necessary, an assurance of the existence of a world beyond the rational reality. In an age of Reason, when the approach to ancient faiths is barred by an accumulation of dogma which the free mind cannot accept, the only way to a

faith is the way of self-exploration, the way so majestically described by the modern French poet:

> J'ai fui partout: partout j'ai retrouvé la Loi
> Quelque chose en moi qui soit plus moi-même que moi.

And the road to this discovery is the discrimination between the true emotion and the false, between the permanent and the ephemeral reaction. Just in so far as the eighteenth-century poets strove for an emotional sincerity —the truest of them before Blake got no farther on the road than this—they have endured. It is this, and this alone, which keeps untarnished the faint radiance of scattered lines of Parnell and Shenstone, and even of Akenside.

Parnell's

> 'Twas thus, as under shade I stood
> I sang my wishes to the wood,
> And lost in thought no more perceived
> The branches whisper as they waved:
> It seemed as all the quiet place
> Confessed the presence of the grace:

Shenstone's

> But sure, to soothe our youthful dreams
> Those banks and streams appeared more bright
> Than other banks, than other streams;

and perhaps the last two lines of the dour Akenside's poem to his Amoret:

> This, sure, is Beauty's happiest part:
> This gives the most unbounded sway:
> This shall enchant the subject heart
> When rose and lily fade away
> And she be still, in spite of time,
> Sweet Amoret in all her prime;

—each seems to be kept alive by the faint breath of a true emotion.

True emotion, of the same kind as this, is what lifts much of Cowper's poetry above the ravages of time. The perfectly simple human feeling of his poem to his lifelong companion, Mrs. Unwin:

> The twentieth year is wellnigh past
> Since first our sky was overcast;
> Ah, would that this might be the last!
> My Mary!

or the more tragic confession of

> To me the waves that ceaseless broke
> Upon the dangerous coast
> Hoarsely and ominously spoke
> Of all my treasure lost.

> Your sea of troubles you have past
> And found the peaceful shore;
> I, tempest-tossed, and wrecked at last,
> Come home to port no more—

have made them durable. But the finest quintessence of poetry is not in them. The separation between the dark ecstasies of Cowper's acquired Calvinism and the nature of the man himself was too great. His religion could not nourish his poetry: it merely broke the man.

And, however difficult it may be to analyse exactly, this sense of separation between the sources of poetry and the mind of the poet is what chiefly haunts us as we read Mr. Doughty's narrative. If the poet was for a moment uplifted on 'the seraph wings of Fantasy' it was only that the catastrophe should be the more disastrous. Christopher Smart had the vision of his *Song to David* only in order to qualify for the mad-house: Collins achieved his *Ode to Evening* only to succumb to melancholia; and the transports of Cowper's sombre religion could never enter his poetry at all. Like men who are fed after starvation, their comfort was only an increase of their pain. If they saw, then what they saw was something irreconcilable with the life in which they were involved, and the vision merely intensified their despair; if they attained a momentary faith, they could not hold it long enough to make an assertion of it, they could not slowly master it and make it their own until it became a thing by which they could work and live, as Keats and Shelley and Wordsworth

and Blake were to do. They could not trust themselves.

We can conceive no more terrible fate for the man of vision than a real isolation, without friends or disciples to confirm his faith in his own insight. To triumph over such conditions his strength would need to be superhuman. That the poets of our eighteenth century did not triumph appears just an inevitable necessity when we contrast the solid phalanx which the poets of the romantic revival presented to the world with the solitude in which their predecessors worked and died. What, we cannot help wondering, would Kit Smart have been had he known Blake? As it was, the proof of his lunacy was his power to write such verses as these.

For Adoration, in the dome
Of Christ the sparrows find a home,
  And on His olives perch;
The swallow also dwells with thee,
O man of God's humility,
  Within his Saviour's church . . .

Strong is the lion—like a coal
His eyeball,—like a bastion's mole
  His chest against the foes;
Strong the gier-eagle on his sail,
Strong against tide the enormous whale
  Emerges as he goes.

But stronger still, in earth and air,
And in the sea, the man of prayer,

And far beneath the tide;
And in the seat to faith assigned,
Where ask is have and seek is find,
Where knock is open wide.

And what might not Chatterton have done, could he have known the great poet who turned to him from Milton and 'watered his name with tears'? Even more than of Smart in Blake, we catch the deliberate echo in Keats of such lines of Chatterton as these:

When Autumn blake and sun-burned both appear
With his gold hand gilding the fallen leaf
Bringing up Winter to fulfil the year,
Bearing upon his back the ripèd sheaf;
When all the hills with woody seed are white;
When levin-fires and lanes do meet from far the sight;
When the fair apple, ruddy as even-sky,
Do bend the tree unto the fructile ground:
When juicy pears and berries of black dye
Do dance in air, and call the eyne around;
Then, be the even foul, or even fair,
Methinks my heartes joy is steynced with some care.

Such conjectures are, no doubt, as idle as any 'might have beens.' Yet the confrontation of such related poets as Smart and Blake, or Chatterton and Keats, the comparison between the fair flowers 'no sooner blown but blasted,' and the full unfolding that was to come, once more suggests the question: Why was it so?

We have said they were isolated; but the further question, What was the cause of their isolation? is insistent. It is hardly enough to repeat that it was, after all, the Age of Reason; that men's minds were deliberately turned towards a goal that is alien to poetry; or that they thought it a derogation of their humanity to accept satisfactions of which their intellects had not complete control. That is a logical and coherent statement of the facts, yet it is hardly sufficient. The desires of the soul cannot easily be eradicated; they are perennial. When we look back on the eighteenth century, it seems that these desires were satisfied neither by poetry nor religion nor works. But this calm Palladian front of impassivity and decorum was not to be had for nothing; it must, we feel, have been bought at a price. And we find ourselves returning for some knowledge of the inward struggle to the familiar figure of Dr. Johnson. Only in the living pages of Boswell can his effort after complete rationality be squared with his childish prayers and dogmatic faith. But within the soul of the old hero was perpetual war, showing itself to the world as profound melancholy. It was not so much that he was blind to the vision or insensible to the appeals of another kingdom, as that he was afraid of them. The man who put down the phrase: 'the hunger of the imagination which preys upon life' was not writing in ignorance. He had surely felt it himself. But it seemed to him, as it has seemed to many a rationalist since, that the hunger was ravenous, insatiable, and disastrous. It was an appetite which had best be strangled at birth, for who could tell

into what strange deserts it might lead? Were he once to let go his hold on the rock of reason, he would be drowned in the flood.

Johnson was at war with himself. The more he thundered against the deserters of common sense in life and literature, the closer he clung to his own naïve religious faith. As he was extreme in the one, he was extreme in the other also; he was like a man dragged asunder by the wild horses of opposed desires. Had he known that there was no cause for fear, had his great honesty had the power to go deeper, to attempt to reconcile his religious creed with his literary faith and take the consequences of the necessary exploration, then perhaps some chapters in the history of poetry in his time might have been less desolating than they are. As it was, he paid the penalty of his contradictions and his fears; he refused to let the hunger of the imagination prey upon life, and he suffered the same torments as the half-hearted rebels against reason who could not refuse. Like Collins and Gray and Cowper, he endured agonies of melancholy, for no less than they he suffered from the divided soul.

But there was, indeed, no cause for fear; the hunger of the imagination is insatiable only so long as it is denied satisfaction. The other kingdom is terrifying only to those who, having been vouchsafed a Pisgah-sight of it, refuse or are afraid to advance and make it their own. The next generation of English poets was to have the courage of its own necessities, and though its destinies were tragic also, the tragedy was temporal and not spiri-

tual; they have left behind them an abiding sense of fulfilment. Of the four great romantic poets of the early nineteenth century there was not one who hesitated to proclaim his faith in a reality beyond the visible, or who by drawing back from unthinkable thoughts or unsayable sayings betrayed his own assurance of certainty. What could not be said, could be shown. And those who stumble over their statements receive the truth from their parables. They may recognise it no further than to say that Keats and Shelley and Wordsworth and Blake were great poets, because they wrote great poetry. But it is a kind of cowardice to leave the matter there. If great poetry is important to a man, it behoves him to inquire in what its greatness consists.

The four great poets who came to satisfy the pent-up longings of a century were, above all, seekers after the truth. What truth they found they tried to utter, and they did utter. But the utterance of poetry is not the utterance of logic. Neither is the philosophy of poetry the philosophy of the schools. Remembering this, we may claim for them precisely and in terms the vindication of the sentence of Sir Joshua Reynolds, which Mr. Doughty quotes as evidence of the unacceptable demands made by the age of Reason upon poetry:

> Well-turned periods in eloquence, or harmony of numbers in poetry, however highly we may esteem them, can never be considered as of equal importance with the art of unfolding truths that are of importance

to mankind, and which make men better and wiser.

What perhaps Sir Joshua did not know was that the truths which are of importance to mankind and which make man better and wiser, are truths of such a kind that they cannot be expounded in maxims or formulated articles. The rational mind cannot apprehend them; and in respect to them, its essential function is to learn and to acknowledge its own insufficiency. The pinnacle of a pure rationality is a convinced and willing self-abnegation.

If we are to indict the age of Reason—but it is still harder to indict an age than a nation—if we are to indicate wherein the age of Reason failed, we must say that it did not fulfil its own professions. It was not rational enough, just as Dr. Johnson himself was not rational enough. And when the moment came, and the soul of man revolted against the bitter bread of reason, and ate greedily of what the poets offered them, not even then was rationality convinced of its own final impotence. Not until our own age have the acknowledged masters of the intellect made a convinced and willing surrender. The concluding sentences of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* are the philosophical echo of Einstein's physical revelations; the subtle rationalist is at one with the genius of scientific thought.

We feel (says Wittgenstein) that even if *all possible* scientific questions be answered, the problems of life

have still not been touched at all. Of course there is then no question left, and just this is the answer.

The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem.

(Is not this the reason why men to whom after long doubting the sense of life became clear, could not then say wherein this sense consisted?)

The sense of life was clear, or partly clear, to the poets of the 'romantic revival.' They, no more than the greatest poets before them, could *say* wherein the sense consisted; but precisely because they could not say it, they could show it. Perhaps Sir Joshua would have been surprised at the manner in which they obeyed his behest to 'unfold truths of importance to mankind'; but, when his surprise was over, and—acute critic as he was—he had examined the manifest difference between compulsion of the being and conviction of the intellect, he could then have added the necessary corollary to his sentence; namely, that only when poets are occupied with the act of unfolding truths of importance to mankind can they achieve the most splendid periods in eloquence or the finest harmony in numbers. A poet can become a great poet only if his message is urgent. The poets of the eighteenth century languished chiefly because of their knowledge that their messages were not urgent.

[*December*, 1922.]

THE MADNESS OF CHRISTOPHER SMART

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Mr. Edmund Blunden, who is a poet of real gifts, and therefore not afraid to sink his individuality in the laborious work of rescuing his predecessors from oblivion, has followed up his edition of the poetry of John Clare with a new edition of Christopher Smart's *Song to David*.[1] Not that Kit Smart is quite so forgotten as Clare was: he is one of the little flies immortalised in the pellucid and enduring amber of Boswell's *Johnson*.

> Burney: How does poor Smart do, Sir; is he likely to recover?
>
> Johnson: It seems as if his mind had ceased to struggle with the disease; for he grows fat upon it.
>
> Burney: Perhaps, Sir, that may be from want of exercise.
>
> Johnson: No, Sir; he has partly as much exercise as he used to have, for he digs in the garden. Indeed, before his confinement, he used for exercise to walk to the ale house; but he was *carried* back again. I did not think he ought to be shut up. His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him ; and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as any one else. Another charge was, that he did not love clean linen; and I have no passion for it.

[1] *A Song to David, with other Poems.* By Christopher Smart. Chosen, with biographical and critical preface, by Edmund Blunden. (R. Cobden Sanderson.)

While he was shut up in the asylum, Kit Smart wrote the *Song to David* and the *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. No doubt in the 1760's, in the full prime of the Age of Reason, those poems were an additional and conclusive evidence of Smart's insanity. The same rationality which clapped Smart in the madhouse imposed the Stamp Act on the American Colonies. Nowadays, pretending to a wisdom after the event, we should call this reason a want of imagination. But whether we English have any more imagination now is a question to which an honest answer is disturbing.

From this angle the history of English poetry in the eighteenth century is a singularly depressing story. The real poets were all 'mad.' Chatterton, Savage, Collins, Smart, Cowper, were suicides or lunatics, or both. Even the equable Gray was on the verge of melancholia. At the end of the sombre procession comes John Clare, 'the asylum poet,' whom the doctor certified for the madhouse because he showed an unconquerable inclination to write verses. And at the end of the period, when a few holes in the leaden pall of 'rationality' had been made by the lightnings of the French Revolution, some of the great ones had narrow escapes. Coleridge was safely lodged in Gilman's house; and what would have happened to Keats and Shelley, had they not died before society had begun to take serious notice of them, who can say? Wordsworth opted for sanity, and his poetry fled.

It is not a comfortable retrospect. In the old, old days before modern 'civilisation' had begun its levelling, there

was more room for the poets. They were mad, but their madness was 'divine.' The gods, nay, the very principle of the divine, visited them. But in the Age of Reason, they were simply mad. No more divinity about their delusions: no more reverence for the great unspeakable power which manifested through them. Our modern civilisation is wonderful, tremendous, terrifying; but it has no room for these things. It does not want, and it will not have, the prophet and the seer. The poet, the authentic poet, is no less: he is the *vates sacer* now, as ever, for the truth he knows is eternal. But there is no room for it in the philosophy of modern civilisation, and modern civilisation will one day pay the penalty for trying to shut out what is older and more enduring than itself.

Such are the thoughts one has in reading Christopher Smart again. Most people who know anything about poetry know the *Song to David:* there is a good solid chunk of it in the *Oxford Book of English Verse;* but a whole is better than a part, and the most astonishing thing about the *Song to David* is that it is a whole. For its uniqueness —and there is *nothing* like it in the great range of English poetry—chiefly consists in the unexpected combination of unity, of swift and firm design, of vivid *ordonnance* (to use Coleridge's word) with an impassioned and ecstatic sublimity which one would have thought rebellious by nature to such discipline. Not to know the *Song to David* as a whole is in a very real sense not to know it at all.

But the *Song to David* is not new: what will be new to most people is the strange quality of Smart's *Hymns and*

Spiritual Songs, some of which Mr. Blunden has rescued, together with a good deal of merely trivial verse. These *Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Fasts and Festivals of the Church of England* were printed together with his versions of the Psalms and the second edition of the *Song to David* in 1765. I imagine from the internal evidence that Smart wrote the versions of the Psalms first, then being uplifted by the splendour of the Psalmist's imagination and controlled by his knowledge of the Psalmist's art, uttered the *Song to David*, and finally, relaxed into a mood of calm and simple serenity, composed the *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*.

However this may be, there are marvellous things in them, and these things are marvellous in a way quite different from that of the *Song to David*. Consider, for example, the last two verses of *The Nativity*.

> Spinks and ouzels sing sublimely,
> 'We too have a Saviour born';
> Whiter blossoms burst untimely
> On the blest Mosaic Thorn.
>
> God all-bounteous, all-creative,
> Whom no ills from good dissuade,
> Is incarnate, *and a native*
> *Of the very world he made.*

There is a simple miracle in that last line and a half: and one need not be a professing Christian to feel that it is the

miracle of the Nativity itself. Or take lines from *St. Philip and St. James.*

> And the lily smiles supremely
> Mentioned by the Lord on earth. . . .

This is the true, the strange Christian *naïveté*: the sense or the knowledge that all living creatures are brothers of men, children of God, and can only be understood in virtue of the one love which unites them all. By this spirit the primæval innocence of Eden (of which Rubens had a Pisgah-sight in his great picture) is restored, and for the moment that we share it we are no longer fallen away from our first perfection. It is the great Christian *naïveté* of St. Francis. It was to be manifested again, half a century later, in the poetry of John Clare, for the fitful yet unmistakable gleam plays over all Clare's work.

> The very darkness smiles to wear
> The stars that show us God is there.

It is a perception, a knowledge, a mode of understanding, which Christ Himself brought into the world. 'Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?' Before Christ, no one of whom memory remains to us had spoken words like these: before Him, this sense of communion in life between all living creatures did not exist. There is no record of it in the words of the wise before Him: the beautiful descriptions of nature in the ancient poets—and in spite of the common report, there *are* beautiful

descriptions of nature in the ancient poets—are of another kind. They have not this immediacy of contact: the blood bond of brothers is not there. And, to speak truth, it is not in many poets of the Christian era: it is not, I believe, in Shakespeare, or in Dante, or in Milton, or even in Wordsworth. Wordsworth is too deliberate; there is a grave and deep philosophy in his attitude. But this *naïveté* is spontaneous, like the kiss one may sometimes surprise between two little children who believe themselves unwatched. I have seen such a kiss between two tiny staggerers in the Luxembourg Gardens. It is innocent, it is rapturous, and it is wise.

I find the gleam of it everywhere in Smart's *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, as I find it everywhere in Clare. I can describe it only as a glimpse of simple and incredible purity. No one can hold a mystery all the time; perhaps few can perceive it when it is pointed out to them: the pointing-out stands in the way. But it seems not only to hover, but to rest in the last three verses of *St. Philip and St. James.*

Hark! aloud the blackbird whistles,
With surrounding fragrance blest,
And the goldfinch in the thistles
Makes provision for her nest.

Even the hornet hives for honey,
Bluecap builds his stately dome,
And the rocks supply the coney
With a fortress and a home.

But the servants of the Saviour,
Which with gospel-peace are shod,
Have no bed but what the paviour
Makes them in the porch of God.

That, to me, is Franciscan poetry *in excelsis*.

And suddenly, when I think that Christopher Smart and John Clare, who had perhaps more of this strange and peculiar gift of *naïveté* than any other of our poets, were both shut up in asylums, I wonder whether St. Francis, yes, and Christ himself, would not be safeguarded in the same way; and I turn out of my pocket-book a cutting of *The Times* report of the Harnett lunacy case, which has lately shocked English public opinion. 'All that Mr. Harnett had'—of the evidence on which he was certified as a lunatic—'was the statement of Dr. Gray (the assistant medical-officer at the asylum) that "You have too much Jesus about you." ' It is a dangerous thing to have.

We take our Dr. Johnson too much from Boswell. We cannot help it. If we are to see the great man at all, we must see him through Boswell's eyes. But we should be on our guard against feeling him through Boswell's mind. We need not echo the thundering paradox of Macaulay, in order to agree with him that Boswell was too small to *understand* his hero. Boswell was smug and satisfied in the Age of Reason: Johnson had had terrifying glimpses of what lay beyond. If Johnson had written only the single phrase, 'the hunger of the imagination

which preys upon life,' we should know that he knew there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamed of in Boswell's philosophy. We must never forget that Johnson was religious in an age of irreligion; and the knowledge which he compressed by force of will within the rigid framework of his rationality shows nowhere more clearly than in the implications of his later remark on Kit Smart:

> Madness frequently discovers itself by unnecessary deviation from the usual modes of the world. My poor friend Smart showed the disturbance of his mind by falling upon his knees, and saying his prayers in the street, or in any other unusual place. Now, although, rationally speaking, it is greater madness not to pray at all, than to pray as Smart did, I am afraid there are so many who do not pray, that their understanding is not called in question.

[*April*, 1924.]

THE CASE OF JOHN CLARE

THE CASE OF JOHN CLARE

Not many poets justify and repay editorial piety more bountifully than John Clare. Though comparatively few of his poems achieve the beauty of form which is the evidence of completely mastered and related perceptions, scarce one of them is without a strange intrinsic beauty of the perception itself. Clare's sensibility was of the finest and most delicate, and his emotional response to nature almost inhumanly sweet and pure. His weakness lay in his power of poetic thought. Inevitably, in reading these precious additions made by Mr. Blunden to his previous collection of Clare's poetry,[1] we are reminded once more, as we were reminded at the time of the first collection, of Wordsworth. Even more than then the comparison of Clare with Wordsworth seems necessary if we are to gain that precise sensation of Clare's individuality, without which it is scarcely possible to know a poet fully. And not only does Wordsworth appear necessary to a criticism of Clare, but Clare to a criticism of Wordsworth. The reference is reciprocal: it is also quite unavoidable. We doubt whether anyone could read, without thinking immediately of Wordsworth, Clare's beautiful poem in this volume on *The Primrose Bank*:

> With its little brimming eye
> And its crimp and curdled leaf
> Who can pass its beauties by?

[1] *Madrigals and Chronicles:* Being newly-found Poems written by John Clare. Edited with a Preface and Commentary by Edmund Blunden.

For here evidently was someone to whom a primrose by the river's brim was, in a sense, just a primrose: but it was wholly a primrose, not 'something more' indeed, but altogether itself. 'Its little brimming eye,' 'its crimp and curdled leaf,' are phrases which almost make us hold our breath in order not to disturb the exquisite perfection of their truth. And this truth is of such a kind that it is complete: there is nothing more to be said, and perhaps nothing more to be thought. At least it is hard to imagine that the poet to whose vision a primrose thus appeared, who could express what he saw with an ease and naturalness such that the expression strikes as part of the very act of seeing, in whose eyes (it is obvious) 'Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these,' should ever have thought, or ever have had the impulse to think, about what he saw. The particularity of the created universe was sufficient for him; he saw each several thing in itself as sovereign and beautiful. What more did he need, what more can we ask?

Clare's faculty of sheer vision is unique in English poetry: not only is it far purer than Wordsworth's, it is purer even than Shakespeare's. Or, it might be wiser to say, Shakespeare passed so quickly beyond this stage of pure vision that only traces of it remain. And yet we feel there is an intrinsic impossibility that vision of this kind, so effortless and unparading, should ever pass beyond itself; we feel it must demand so complete an engagement and submission of the whole man that it leaves no margin for other faculties. Clare's vision, we might say para-

doxically, is too perfect. Shakespeare had as much of it as a man can have if he is to develop into a full maturity; Wordsworth had some of it. Wordsworth's vision came to him by flashes, therefore it seemed to him an abnormal and extaordinary visitation which needed to be related by thought and meditation to ordinary experience. We may put it in this way: If Wordsworth had seen a primrose as Clare saw it—and he did occasionally see things thus—he would have felt that he was seeing 'into the heart of things,' whereas Clare—who seems always to have seen in this way—felt that he was merely seeing things. It is dangerous to be made after so unusual a pattern, and Clare was locked up.

The penalty was monstrous, an indescribable refinement of torture for this child-man whose very life was seeing things. But it was an awful approximation made by half-knowledge to the truth that Clare was not really a man. Those thoughts, for which his seeing left no room to grow, are necessary to the condition of manhood, and therefore necessary also to the writing of the finest poetry. Wordsworth, in his preface to the second *Lyrical Ballads*, was essentially right.

> All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, has also thought long and deeply.

Never were the primary conditions of poetry, as Wordsworth defined them, more exactly satisfied than by Clare. He was possessed of infinitely more than 'usual organic sensibility,' and all his poetry is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.' Wordsworth's general definition is a precise description of Clare's work: the epithets, 'organic' of his sensibility and 'spontaneous' of his emotion, fit Clare more happily than any other poet who comes to mind. And the reason is that the poetic natures of Clare and Wordsworth were closely allied. The difference between them is that Clare could not, while Wordsworth could, think long and deeply.

This inability of Clare's was a defect of his quality; and it was because Wordsworth's sensibility was not so pure or so uninterrupted as Clare's that he had the opportunity and the need for thought. But even for him thought was something almost unnatural, so that he was extremely conscious of himself thinking and of himself as a thinker. His thought is not always spontaneous as Shakespeare's is always spontaneous, and as Keats's thought promised to be spontaneous; we are often aware of it as an element that is not really fused with his perception, but super-imposed upon it, and Wordsworth's poetry then takes on that slightly didactic, slightly distasteful tone of which Keats (who belonged to the Shakespearian order) was so acutely conscious when he wrote about Wordsworth:

> We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us,

> and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze it with itself, but with its subject. How beautiful are the retired flowers! How they would lose their beauty were they to throng to the highway, crying out, 'Admire me, I am a violet! Dote upon me, I am a primrose!'

In this criticism of Wordsworth by a still finer poetic mind than his own, the ground is, as it were, once more cleared for a just approach to Clare. Again the very words are apt to him. His poetry is 'unobtrusive.' 'How beautiful are the retired flowers!' is true of him perhaps more than any other poet. His poetry has no 'palpable design upon us'; it has no design upon us at all.

The cause of Clare's so curiously fitting into these utterances of his great poetic contemporaries, is, first, that he was in the essential as authentic a poet as they; and, secondly, that he was allied to Wordsworth by the nature of his 'organic sensibility' and to Keats by his wonderful spontaneity. Wordsworth would have denied poetic 'greatness' to Clare because of his lack of thought; but Keats would have denied poetic 'greatness' to much of Wordsworth's work because of its lack of spontaneity and unobtrusiveness. These criticisms, in their ascending order, are just and profound, and they establish the real precedence of these three true poets. Moreover, this conclusion follows: in order that Clare should have

been as great a poet as he was a true one, the quality of his thought would have needed to be equal to the quality of his perception, equally spontaneous, equally organic. Then he would have been, in Keats's phrase, both 'great and unobtrusive,' and a very great poet indeed. As it is, he is unobtrusive and true, not a great poet, but assuredly not a little one—a child, on whom the rarest and most divine gift of vision had so abundantly descended that he could not become a man.

The quality in Clare which most enthrals us, the general quality of which the quintessence is manifest in the beauty of his seeing, is one which we can only describe as a kind of *naïveté*. If we use a similitude, we might say it was an abiding sense of a quite simple fraternity with all the creatures of the world save self-conscious man. Man, the thinker, the calculator, the schemer, falls outside this universe of simple comprehension, and is the inhabitant of an alien world. He will not enter; he has no wedding garment. And the reality of Clare's vision and its power over our hearts is such that there are moments when our conviction that this is a limitation of Clare's understanding suddenly abandons us and we have a secret fear that his may be the true and unattainable wisdom. 'Except ye become as little children . . .' That fear does not remain with us; we know that the word is not thus literally to be understood. Our childhood must come to us as the achievement of our manhood. We cannot divest ourselves of our birthright. But Clare's *naïveté* reinforces the admonition of the word, that

unless we can achieve, out of all our wisdom and despairs, a comprehension as pure as was his vision, we shall have lost the day.

For in Clare's vision is indubitable truth, not comprehensive, not final, but because it strikes our hearts as truth, and is truth, it is prophetic of the final and comprehensive truth. It is melody, not harmony:

> Yes, night is happy night,
> The sky is full of stars,
> Like worlds in peace they lie
> Enjoying one delight.

But true melody, as this is, is separated from false harmony by a whole universe of error. If it has not been troubled by thought, it has also not been corrupted by the temptation to turn stones into bread. The spontaneous feeling of

> [He] felt that lovely mood
> As a birthright God had given
> To muse in the green wood
> And meet the smiles of heaven,

though it does not itself achieve it, would at least never be satisfied by thought that was not as spontaneous as itself; it would have no room for the speculations of mere intellectual pride. And Clare's nascent thoughts, as far as they go, are as true as his feelings; indeed they *are* feelings:

I thought o'er all life's sweetest things
Made dreary as a broken charm,
Wood-ridings where the thrush still sings
And love went leaning on my arm.

Experience, the organic knowledge from which organic thought is born, was for Clare the dreary breaking of a charm. The phrase is beautifully, agonisingly true. Up to the extreme verge of his capacity Clare never betrayed himself. On the one side his world of his vision, on the other side broken charms and mystery; he did not, he could not, try to reconcile them. When he was shut out by destiny and the hand of man, from his own world, he lived within the memory of it. In *Mary*, a poem to his child-love, the memory is heart-breaking even to us:

Mary, or sweet spirit of thee,
As the bright sun shines to-morrow
Thy dark eyes these flowers shall see
Gathered by me in sorrow,
In the still hour when my mind was free
To walk alone—yet wish I walked with thee.

Something terrible has been done to this child-man that he is forced to wander in an alien world alone. It was intolerable to him, and it is intolerable to us who hear the voice of his suffering. Yet, though the charm was broken and he was outcast from his world, he was loyal to it. He did not betray his knowledge. The evidence

of his triumphant loyalty is in the last, and the greatest, of the poems in this book. It is obscure, because Clare was struggling with an order of thought to which he was not born, but in spite of the obscurity, its purity and truth and justice are manifest. He had indeed 'kept his spirit with the free.'

I lost the love of Heaven above,
  I spurned the lust of Earth below,
I felt the sweets of fancied love
  And Hell itself my only foe.

I lost Earth's joys, but felt the glow
  Of Heaven's flame abound in me
Till loveliness and I did grow
  The bard of Immortality.

I loved, but woman fell away;
  I hid me from her faded flame.
I snatched the sun's eternal ray
  And wrote till Earth was but a name.

In every language upon earth,
  On every shore, o'er every sea,
I gave my name immortal birth
  And kept my spirit with the free.

MATTHEW ARNOLD THE POET

MATTHEW ARNOLD THE POET

In Matthew Arnold the poet were two men, who struggled with one another until they were both exhausted, and the poet was dead.

We may call one of these Romantic, and the other Classical; or we might say that one was the heart and the other the head. It is better, however, not to be too quick with our labels, but rather try to see what was the particular nature of the deep division in his soul. For this division made him the individual poet that he was, and prevented him from becoming the greater poet that he might have been.

Matthew Arnold was a profoundly troubled man. He had no belief; he was honest enough not to disguise from himself that he had none; and he was serious enough to know by bitter experience that it is hard indeed to live without a belief. His loyalty to his own dignity as a human being kept him from seeking self-oblivion by a mere excess of blind activity in a society whose spirit seemed to him dead and its motives sordid. Yet, though he tried, he could not find in himself that inward confidence of soul which alone, as he well knew, would enable him to stand firm in isolation. A deep disbelief in the world calls for a correspondingly deep belief in oneself. This Matthew Arnold could not achieve. His was always

> the old unquiet heart
> That neither deadens into rest

Nor ever feels the fiery glow
That whirls the spirit from itself away,
But fluctuates to and fro,
Never by passion quite possessed
And never quite benumbed by the world's sway.

It seemed to him that he could never possess his soul. Somewhere in the depths of himself, he believed, was concealed the truth of his own being, a life and a law of life indefeasibly his; but he could not make contact with them, save in fitful moments of which neither the influence nor even the memory endured. And he felt that he was like a ship whose compass had been demagnetised before the voyage of life began. The needle did not point steadily to the north; and the courses steered were erratic and contradictory.

And we have been on many thousand lines,
And we have shown on each talent and power,
But hardly have we for one little hour
Been in our own line, have we been ourselves.

To be oneself, to possess one's own soul,—this, Arnold knew, was the necessity; if this could be achieved, belief was achieved and an end of perturbation.

Resolve to be thyself: and know that he
Who finds himself loses his misery.

But, through some hidden weakness, the way could not

be found, the discovery could not be made. The water would not flow from the living rock at the bidding of his resolve. And slowly and steadily his creative impulse withered, because he could not strike the source of life within himself. He was a man of far too fine a nature to pretend to what he did not possess, or claim the discovery of that which he had not found. From the beginning he possessed 'a sad lucidity of soul,' in virtue of which he knew what he was, what he needed, and wherein he failed. The poems of his later years are few and far between; they are cold and incredibly sad. The man who, growing old, could write of that condition, that

> It is to spend long days
> And not once feel that we were ever young

must have remembered that he had a soul chiefly by the pain of iron that had entered into it.

To what could such a man hold fast? Where could he look for balsam for what he called 'the strange disease of modern life'? From whom could he summon aid against 'the something that infects the world'? Being a poet, he turned to the poets. Of the poets who belonged to his own spiritual epoch, he regarded only two as having reached some kind of inward security. They were Goethe and Wordsworth. Yet Goethe seemed to him too remote and Olympian, and Wordsworth to have achieved his serenity by turning his face away from half the things that are. Perhaps, if he had wrestled with

Shakespeare more, and compelled him to stand and abide his question, he would have found a deeper consolation than any which Wordsworth or Goethe could offer. Instead he tried to turn away to the serenity of Greece: the attempt was self-deception.

In a sense, Arnold's classicism was merely the culmination of his romanticism, just as Flaubert's impassivity was an extreme manifestation of his uncontrollable sensibility. These contemporaries were cast in the same mould: they were both by nature romantic individualists, they were both afraid of themselves, each sought safety as an artist in a principle outside himself, and alien to his own nature. Flaubert, the realist, and Matthew Arnold, the classicist, are kindred phenomena; and their works reveal the same radical heterogeneity, the same evidence of the divided soul. It was fortunate that Arnold turned his gifts to criticism: there his creative weakness became his strength, and his indecision was transformed into catholicity. The man who took refuge from his own romanticism in a reverence for the classical tradition was eminently fitted to appreciate excellence in either kind.

But Arnold's efforts as a poet to be classical were less fortunate. The early *Empedocles on Etna*, which is a very obvious transposition of his own romantic attitude into a slight classical setting, is a better poem than the later *Merope*, which is his attempt to be the complete Greek tragedian. Yet he refused to reprint *Empedocles on Etna* because it did not satisfy the Aristotelian canon that drama must be an imitation of actions. As though

Empedocles on Etna were a drama at all! Of his two attempts to apply on a miniature scale something of the classical method to non-classical subjects, *Balder Dead* is a complete and frigid failure. Not so with *Sohrab and Rustum*. That, it seems to me, is Arnold's finest and most original poem. In spite of its frankly Homeric similes—Arnold's impotence with metaphor is significant—and its purely Miltonic blank verse structure, it is a single whole—impressive, dignified, and deeply moving. In *Sohrab and Rustum*, as so often in Arnold's poetry, we can recognise the elements and assign them to their sources; we feel that his borrowings are borrowings, we are fully aware how derivative the poem is; yet it moves and delights us. And the prime cause of this success is that he for once acted instinctively in the spirit of the true classical canon, and chose a really significant human action for his theme. It is the more striking that his instinct should have failed him in *Merope* and *Balder Dead*. He seems to have lacked courage to a point at which he was unable to distinguish between an action which ought on some *a priori* grounds to be significant, and an action which he himself felt to be significant. The story of Sohrab and Rustum moved him; and he moves us by his new creation of it. The stories of Merope and Balder Dead left him cold; and the poems leave us cold. 'No man,' he wrote in the long and tedious preface to *Merope* itself, 'can do his best with a subject which does not penetrate him: no man can be penetrated by a subject which he does not conceive independently.' That is

true; but a poet needs the full courage of himself no less when he seeks the safety of the classical method when he claims for himself romantic liberty. He must have the courage to choose a theme, not because it is like other themes which have proved impressive when conceived by far different minds and created by hands far different from his own, but because it makes an immediate and profound appeal to his instinctive nature. The story of Sohrab and Rustum is as real to the modern consciousness, of which Arnold was an inheritor, as it was to the Persian historian who recorded it. The reality of the story of Merope has passed with the passing of the Greek mind; the truth of the story of Balder has gone the desolate way of the Northern Gods.

Arnold's poetry is divided sharply according to the division which was in himself. On the one hand is his personal and romantic poetry; on the other, the impersonal and classical. The former is the more interesting, but one could scarcely call it the better poetry. Arnold's gait was too heavy for the lyric, and it was only for brief moments that he could move freely and lightly as he did through the whole of *The Forsaken Merman*. There are snatches of authentic lyric in the final song from *Empedocles on Etna*.

> Not here, O Apollo!
> Are haunts meet for thee.
> But, where Helicon breaks down
> In cliff to the sea,

Where the moon-silver'd inlets
Send far the light voice
Up the still vale of Thisbe,
O speed and rejoice!

Yet even there the drag of the heavy foot becomes perceptible, and we feel the imminent menace of Arnold's deliberation.

His most consistent achievement was in the kind which we call elegiac. It suited best with his own persistent mood, of restrained regret for the life which he could not accept and the soul which he could not make his own. Moreover, in his elegiac poetry what Mr. Saintsbury has happily called 'his elaborate assumption of the singing robe' was in keeping with a true and living literary tradition. For the tradition of elegiac poetry, settled once for all in England by the powerful genius of Milton, comes to us unbroken from classical times. In spirit it is not truly classical. The Alexandrian idyllists, Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus, with whom it began, belong to a decadence. That makes them only the more potent and natural influences in a non-classical epoch; for they represent an attitude which was possible only at a time when the self-contained Greek universe was being disintegrated. Though they wrote in Greek, they are modern, and the tradition which takes its rise from them is one which is native to English poetry; the tradition of classical Greek drama is alien to it.

Therefore, when Arnold followed Milton and Shelley

and Keats, in *Thyrsis* and *The Scholar Gipsy*, he was not wasting himself in the hopeless task of trying to resuscitate a dead tradition and a forgotten consciousness. Not only was the mood of dignified melancholy peculiarly his own, but the manner of its expression had been organised into an English tradition by great poets before him. The elegiac tradition, we may fairly say, has become, in spite of its Alexandrian origins, a truly English tradition. It is the nearest thing we have to a definite poetic tradition at all. Matthew Arnold, fearful of leaning wholly upon himself, turned instinctively towards the congenial security it offered, and he achieved two minor triumphs in the kind. That they are very derivative is of no great consequence; those who care for these things should perhaps find only an added delight in the many acts of recognition to which they are compelled. They will experience a curious and subtle pleasure in registering the debt which the famous lines of *The Scholar Gipsy*,

> Far most, I know, thou lovest retired ground.
> Thee, at the ferry, Oxford riders blithe,
> Returning home on summer nights have met
> Crossing the stripling Thames at Bab-lock-hithe,
> Trailing in the cool stream thy fingers wet
> As the slow punt swings round,

owe to the yet more famous lines of Keats's *Ode to Autumn*:

> Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
> Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind. . . .

But these encounters only serve to sharpen the fine point of seldom pleasure; not to blunt it.

Matthew Arnold tired, however, even of elegy. For the one elegy towards which he would have been inexorably driven, had he continued in the vein, would have been an elegy upon himself, on the death of his own soul. Of that elegy there are only snatches and fragments; sudden accents of grinding and empty misery.

Wandering between two worlds, one born
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.

Herein, for all his reticences and restraints, Arnold no less than the wildest romantic was the victim of his own self-deception. He transferred to the world without his own deep division of soul. But it was not the world that had failed, but he. The stream of poetry, of creative life, dwindled and died within him; and he knew the cause. He declared it in *A Nameless Epitaph*:

This sentence have I left behind:
An aching body, and a mind
Not wholly clear, nor wholly blind,
Too keen to rest, too weak to find,
Are God's worst portion to mankind.

[*November*, 1923.]

POE'S POETRY

POE'S POETRY

It has long since been admitted that the two greatest poets of America are Poe and Whitman. The poetry of both belongs to the literature of the world. But there is an essential difference between their positions. Whitman is almost 'a hundred per cent. American'; Poe is not. Whitman is clean outside the English tradition; Poe belongs to it. As a poet he is the successor of the English romantics; he learned from Byron and Shelley and Keats, and he taught Swinburne: as a prose writer, he alone gave to the great romantic movement in fiction which swept over England early in the nineteenth century the immortality of high and serious art. Were it not for the consummation of Poe's tales, the mysteries of Monk Lewis and Mrs. Radcliffe would have been only a *cul-de-sac*. No other American writer has so clearly marked a place in the English tradition as Poe; he is a necessary link in the chain. To compensate, no great American writer is less distinctively American than he. This is not to diminish America's claim to Poe, or to suggest that his life would have been of another kind had he worked in England. The *âmes damnées* of romanticism would no doubt have been unfortunate in any country. But Poe would at least have found congenial companions in London and in Paris; he would have tasted some of the sweets of an immense *succès d'estime;* and perhaps he would have been able to earn more money. It is no good repining over Poe's miserable life now. But more truly

than Baudelaire himself he was the albatross of the famous sonnet; in America he was exiled from his element, and he died in consequence.

Speculation upon what might have been but was not is generally dismissed as idle day-dreaming. But it has a function, and a valuable function, in criticism. It is a method of exercising the logic of the imagination. A great writer is something more than a man who lived his circumscribed physical existence at a given point of time; he is an incarnate potentiality of the human soul, concerning which it is legitimate to inquire whether the conditions attending its embodiment were good or bad. Relatively good, of course, is the best we can hope for genius in this rough world of compromise; the artist has no right to complain if he is misunderstood by the large mass of his contemporaries. But he has the right to expect to be comprehended by a few of his peers. The artist to whom this is denied may arraign the injustice of Heaven. Poe's isolation in America was of this unhappy and stultifying kind, and its effects upon his poetry are plain. For the most remarkable thing about him as a poet is the contrast between his scanty production—even with a long introduction and twenty new fragments, Mr. Whitty's edition makes a very small book—and the natural facility, the unmistakable fecundity, of his poetic genius. Poe was, by endowment, a prolific poet; as prolific as the men between whom he ideally takes his place, as Keats and Shelley, or as Swinburne and Tennyson. He was not by temper a meticulous artist. He theorised about poetry,

it is true; but that was rather a manifestation of his general intellectual alertness (and, to some extent, a gesture of defiance) than a sign of unusual poetic self-consciousness. There is an almost Byronic freedom and flow in his verses; but he had a finer and more delicate mind than Byron's, and some of his poems are on an altogether higher poetic level, while in most of them can be found a few lines of a kind that Byron could never have written.

Moreover, the poems of Poe's boyhood, *Tamerlane*, published when he was eighteen, and *Al Aaraaf*, published when he was twenty, though they have their immaturities, are astonishing productions. They are, indubitably, poems, and they contain passages of imaginative beauty and splendid phrasing. To a modern reader, *Al Aaraaf*, which might justly be called Poe's *Endymion*, holds suggestions both of Keats and of Shelley:

> Now happiest, loveliest in yon lovely earth
> Whence sprang the Idea of Beauty into birth,
> (Falling in wreaths thro' many a startled star
> Like woman's hair 'mid pearls, until, afar,
> It lit on hills Achaian, and there dwelt)
> She looked into Infinity—and knelt.

Surely, one says, that is the work of a young man who not only has 'the vision and the faculty divine,' but has also read Keats and Shelley. Yet it must be very doubtful whether Poe had read them when he wrote *Al Aaraaf*.

It was written at some time between 1827 and 1829—that is, before the Galignani edition of the two English poets, and at a time when the total number of copies of books by both of them not gathering dust upon the publishers' shelves, probably did not exceed a thousand. It is hardly likely that a dozen had crossed the Atlantic, and less likely still that two of them fell into the hands of an impecunious soldier in a Virginian garrison.

The point is interesting. Even if *Al Aaraaf* owed something to Keats and Shelley, it is still a remarkable achievement. But if it owed them nothing it is altogether astonishing. Its richness, its movement, its lucidity, its evident creation out of overflow, make it one of those rare *juvenilia* from which can surely be predicted poetical eminence to come. This eminence Poe never completely attained, simply because the body of his finest work is not massive enough; he has the quality but not the quantity of a great poet. And this imperfect realisation of his poetic powers was due, as the internal evidence alone makes clear, not to any deficiency in himself, but to the hostile conditions in which he was compelled to work.

> Events not to be controlled [he wrote in the preface to the 1845 edition of his *Poems*] have prevented me from making, at any time, any serious effort in what, under happier circumstances, would have been the field of my choice. With me poetry has been not a purpose, but a passion; and the passions should be held in reverence; they must not—they cannot at will be

> excited, with an eye to the paltry compensations, or the more paltry commendations, of mankind.

Our impulse is to suspect such a declaration. In Poe's case it was the simple truth.

After the first striking contrast between his obvious fecundity and the smallness of his production, another no less striking appears, between the comparative crudity of some of his poems and the delicate austerity of others. The crudity of *The Raven* and *Lenore* is, of course, only relative. These popular poems do produce their effect; and still more certainly *The Bells* is successful. But when we compare them with *Ulalume* and *Annabel Lee* we feel that the creative impulse has been coarsened. The technical power is constant, but the degree to which Poe's poetic individuality is realised is much less in the one than the other. It is the difference between the romance which the early nineteenth-century public adored and the romance which haunted Poe's mind—the heightened awareness of spiritual mystery which he so beautifully expressed in the little poem *Romance*:

> Of late, eternal Condor years
> So shake the very Heaven on high
> With tumult as they thunder by,
> I have no time for idle cares
> Through gazing on the unquiet sky.
> And when an hour with calmer wings
> Its down upon my spirit flings—

That little time with lyre and rhyme
To while away—forbidden things!
My heart would feel to be a crime
Unless it trembled with the strings.

In Poe's most popular poems his heart does not 'tremble with the strings.' We know, because there are many of his poems in which it does, where the poem is the expression of an intimate romantic emotion which has hardly more than the name in common with the crude supernatural thrills in which his contemporaries delighted.

The essence of Poe's romance is the eternal perplexity of the soul that turns aside from the harsh reality to the imagined perfection of a dream; it is a spirit akin to that which finds utterance in Mr. De la Mare's poetry to-day. And in Mr. De la Mare's poetry we find the distinctest echoes of Poe's subtler music. Compare the modern poet's *Thule*—itself a familiar country of Poe's—with:

Helen, thy beauty is to me
  Like those Nicean barks of yore
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
  The weary way-worn wanderer bore
  To his own native shore.

That note as surely sounds on in Mr. De la Mare's work as Swinburne prolonged the robuster reverberations of *Ulalume:*

Astarte's bediamonded crescent
Distinct with its duplicate horn.

But, though Poe had many manners, he had but a single matter; and the manner which best suited it is not the manner by which he is best known. His finest poems (such as the lines *To Helen* or *The Sleeper*) are far quieter than those for which he is most famous, for his matter is secret and subtle and shy. The raven perched on the bust of Pallas is but a poor symbol for the intimate mystery. *Eldorado* touches it much more nearly and is, in consequence, a simple and perfect poem. It is Poe's equivalent of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, as *Al Aaraaf* is his *Endymion*. And this curious parallelism with Keats appears again in the low-toned and beautiful poems in blank verse addressed to various women. Poe seems to have shared Keats's determination to escape if he could from the dramatic artificiality of blank verse, and to make it responsive to more personal emotions. Like Keats himself, he was not wholly successful; but we are struck by the curious resemblance in tone between the rewritten Induction to *Hyperion* and such an opening of Poe's as this:

Not long ago, the writer of these lines,
In the mad pride of intellectuality,
Maintained the power of word, denied that ever
A thought arose within the human brain
Beyond the utterance of the human tongue.

Compare with this the lines from the opening of the new *Hyperion:*

> Who alive can say,
> 'Thou art no poet—mayst not tell thy dreams?'
> Since every man whose soul is not a clod
> Hath visions and would speak if he had loved,
> And been well nurtured in his mother-tongue.
> Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse
> Be poet's or fanatic's will be known
> When this warm scribe, my hand, is in the grave.

There is a curious tonelessness (which some might call mere flatness) common to the blank verse of these two poets towards the end of their lives. Both alike give the impression that they have touched the fringe of a truth more sacred to them than Art itself.

Poe's tragedy as a poet is that he was compelled to a compromise: he was forced by the necessities of living to use his great rhythmical gift in writing poems that might pass with an American editor of the Martin Chuzzlewit period. It is not surprising that he gave up the struggle, and devoted himself to prose of a kind that permitted him to make a little money without losing his own self-respect. Keats without his £2,000, Shelley without his private income—would they, we wonder, have written more, or more finely, than Poe? But they would at least have been sustained by a handful of understanding friends. It does not appear that Poe had one.

The twenty new poems that have been unearthed by Mr. Whitty for this edition[1] are without importance, with the exception of one, a love-poem beginning:

> Sleep on, sleep on, another hour —
> I would not break so calm a sleep,
> To wake to sunshine and to shower,
> To smile and weep.

It has not the perfectly individual sentiment of Poe's best poems, but it is limpid and beautiful, and it is a valuable addition to his work. Most of the other pieces are scraps and album rhymes. One of them is worth remembering as a sample of the sentimental punning which poets of Poe's day permitted themselves. It is indited to a lady called Kate Carol.

> When from your gems of thought I turn
> To those pure orbs your heart to learn,
> I scarce know which to prize more high —
> The bright *i-dea*, or bright *dear-eye*.

Keats and Lamb both did that kind of thing occasionally; but even they never did anything worse. Young ladies and albums have a great deal to answer for; yet, to be honest, Poe seems to have owed to them some of the happiest moments of his miserable life.

[*March*, 1922.]

[1] *The Complete Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*. Edited by T. R. Whitty. (Constable.)

AMERICAN POETRY

AMERICAN POETRY

We read through the substantial collection of American poetry, called the *Oxford Book of American Verse*, stolidly indeed, but not in mere obedience to a sense of duty. Our curiosity concerning the spiritual destiny of America is absorbing. 'There, but for the grace of God . . .' might have been our feeling twenty or thirty years ago. But to-day we are much less certain that the grace of God has remained on the eastern shores of the Atlantic Ocean. It might have done; but perhaps it just didn't.

And, oddly enough, it is the slow perishing of the grace of God in America that chiefly fascinates one in this sequence of American poetry. But the grace of God that slowly perished in the nineteenth-century America is not the same grace of God that may, for aught I know, be waiting to descend there to-day. Old gods die, new gods are born. Because I can clearly see the perishing of an old god in America I am more inclined to believe in the imminent epiphany of a new one there. Perhaps it is only an effect of distance; perhaps if I lived there, I should be lost, as I seem to be lost here,

> Wandering between two worlds one born,
> The other powerless to be born.

But I think not.

Anyhow, there is constant pleasure, constant excitement even, to be had from noting the individual voices

as they enter into the long recitation which is American poetry. True, there is in this slightly academic collection, no surprise from an unknown name. The latest comer into assured immortality—Emily Dickinson—would, to be sure, not have been found at all in such a collection a dozen years ago; but she has since been recognised, and her place among the stars acknowledged. Nor is anyone we have learned to expect missing, with the one great exception of Herman Melville. At least the Epilogue to *Clarel* and a sequence of verses from that strange poem should have been included. Some of the innumerable album-verses and reciter-poems which inevitably crowd such an anthology might profitably have made way for the intrusion of an uncouth giant who had something to say. The Epilogue to *Clarel* is clumsy enough; but three-quarters of this book of American poetry is thistledown beside it.

If Luther's day expand to Darwin's year,
Shall that exclude the hope—foreclose the fear?

Unmoved by all the claims our times avow,
The ancient Sphinx still keeps the porch of shade,
And comes Despair, whom not her calm may cow,
And coldly on that adamantine brow
Scrawls undeterred his bitter pasquinade.
But Faith (who from the scrawl indignant turns)
With blood warm oozing from her wounded bust,

Inscribes even on her shards of broken urns
The sign of the cross—*the spirit above the dust.*

Yea, ape and angel, strife and old debate—
The harps of heaven and dreary gongs of hell;
Science the feud can only aggravate—
No umpire she betwixt the chimes and knell:
The running battle of the star and clod
Shall run for ever—if there be no God.

Degrees we know, unknown in days before;
The light is greater, hence the shadow more;
And tantalised and apprehensive Man
Appealing—wherefore ripen us to pain?
Seems there the spokesman of dumb Nature's brain.

But through such strange illusions have they passed
Who in life's pilgrimage have baffled striven—
Even death may prove unreal at the last,
And stoics be astounded into heaven.

Then keep thy heart, though yet not ill-designed—
Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;
That like the crocus budding through the snow—
That like a swimmer rising from the deep—
That like a burning secret which doth go
Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;
Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,
And prove that death but routs life into victory.

Melville apart, we note the succession of more or less, yet perceptibly, individual voices: Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Poe, Whitman, Dickinson, Robinson, Frost. The mere names have something to say. There is a family likeness in their Saxon simplicity. America, the melting-pot of nations, finds no expression in them. They are, one is tempted to say, more English than the names of the English poets themselves. But to run through the great English list from Chaucer downwards is to be aware that this is illusion. The home-land catalogue of names is more various and richer in its variety; but it is pure English. The difference is between English and a single strain of English, between an English whole and an English part; in fact, between England and New England. Symbolically enough, the New England list ends with a Frost.

There is plenty of snow in New England poetry. At one end of the list Emerson describes with a light-hearted beauty 'the frolic architecture of the snow'; Whittier likewise has his 'Snowbound,' and he even makes 'the rigour of a frozen clime' full half his excuse for failing to recapture the note of 'Spenser's golden days'; and at the end of it, Robert Frost, of the symbolic name, gives a hint of the grim reality of the element:

> My heart owns a doubt
> Whether 'tis in us to arise with day
> And save ourselves unaided.

But he doubly compensates for the doubt he leaves unresolved, first with the word of the knowing New England farmer to his orchard:

> Good-bye and keep cold.
> Dread fifty above more than fifty below . . .

And then with the deeper assurance:

> I know that winter death has never tried
> The earth but it has failed; the snow may heap
> In long storms an undrifted four feet deep
> As measured against maple, birch and oak;
> It cannot check the Peeper's silver croak;
> And I shall see the snow go down the hill
> In water of a slender April rill
> That flashes tail through last year's withered brake
> And dead weeds like a disappearing snake.
> Nothing will be left white but here a birch
> And there a clump of houses with a church.

An austere landscape, then, is the setting of those austere New England names. But the giant winter loosens his grip and reveals a quicksilver loveliness. The air is clear in New England; the clarity of vision that flashes out in the last lines of Robert Frost shines abundantly in Emerson and Whittier. When a poet of the race yields to it there is poetry indeed, with the bounding outline of Blake's definition, English and not English:

harder, keener, in a sense even brighter than our own, but lacking the rich and lambent softness that we most prize—a New England and a new Englishness. We feel that this loveliness of Nature comes almost unexpectedly; that men have long to wait for it and fall almost to despair; that they need to console themselves with the conscious assurance of an Emerson that

> Nature ever faithful is
> To such as trust her faithfulness.

A moral resolution, something even of a desperate, though justified, choice, lurks in this New England attitude to Nature. Before the voice of comfort there has been a fear. Perhaps the winter will never end; perhaps the great continent will entomb us in her silence. Comes a silver flash of unbound waters, and a leap of the heart, but too sudden and deep for dactylic song. *Jam ver egelidos refert tepores*—that trill of the delighted soul is not in New England poetry. For all its habit of octosyllabics, its lightest measures are grave, and have something of a Covenanter's hymn.

Another race, even of Englishmen, would have wandered southwards to the sun. But these men had found their home. It was the land of the covenant; here their God was manifest. And they brooded upon Him. He was greater and more inscrutable than they had known—the God of a continent, not of an island. An earth-breath, austere still, but tremendous, begins to be

mighty in New England piety; and the possibility of worship in temples made with hands still more forlorn and futile. Not here and there, but everywhere the presence:

> If the red slayer think he slays
> Or if the slain think he is slain
> They know not well the subtle ways
> I keep and pass and turn again.

This New England pantheism, strained beyond the last verge of Christian orthodoxy, is an impressive thing; a potentiality of the human spirit was fully realised in it. The tension is extreme; 'the spirit wavers her eyas wings into the divine obscurity'; but there is harmony. It is puritanism sublimed by a continent.

It lives in the epigoni: Dickinson, Robinson, Frost—all are touched by it. The voice of their poetry is subdued; the notes are clear but muted, as though in their heart of hearts they were afraid of the echo. It might give back they know not what in place of the human song. Nor is the song a song at all. Song comes only when the soul is certain of the echo. These are whispers, meditative, thoughtful, deeply moving, but constrained. One hears, more distinctly perhaps than in any English poetry, the voice of the self-communing soul, aware of its own infinite smallness before the vast. In Emily Dickinson its clarity is heartbreaking.

My life closed twice before its close;
It yet remains to see
If Immortality unveil
A third event to me.

So huge, so hopeless to conceive,
As these that twice befell;
Parting is all we know of heaven
And all we need of hell.

Over against this fear, which island men perhaps can never fully know, the almost stentorian assurance of Whitman sounds more familiar than before. He shouted his barbarian yawp, so to speak, to make sure of the echo.

And I say unto mankind, be not curious about God,
For I who am curious about each am not curious about God.
(No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about Death.)

It is no disrespect to one who was, take him all in all, the greatest of American poets, and a great world-poet, to remark an element of Dutch courage in his bravery. He is not quite so secure as he would have us believe, or why protest so stridently? But when this, and its effect on Whitman's utterance has been remarked, it remains to be acknowledged that in Whitman, as in no other American poet, there is a magnificent effort to pass at once out of

the New England tradition and into a new realisation. Here at last there is opulence; and in his frank, unsubtle way, much of the 'God's plenty' and easy variety which is in English poetry at its greatest. That is not to make the vain attempt to assimilate Whitman to the English tradition, but merely to note that, as poetic nature, Whitman is not, as the rest of the American succession indubitably are, of another kind than Chaucer and Shakespeare. He is infinitely less of the artist, but as 'experiencing nature' or 'organic sensibility,' he does not belong to the Puritan tradition at all. The pantheism which was for Emerson an intellectual creed, for him was immediate experience; therefore it was a very different pantheism. He was native to his continent; no longer the courageous and lonely exile, making precarious peace with the unknown gods.

Whitman thus definitely represents a creative enlargement (which is a polite name for bursting) of the New England tradition. He has his affiliations with what went before him. Hence the stridency of his apostolic asseverations; he had, as Mr. D. H. Lawrence put it, 'his animality on the brain,' which is not where animality should be. Nevertheless, moralist no less but rather more than his forerunners, he purged their morality of its Platonic asceticism. He believed in life by refusing to believe in the soul. He refused the transcendental struggle, as one who sensed the ultimate impoverishment it brings; and he became the prophetic voice of a nation which must go its own way to its own fulfilment. But the succession

to Whitman is not even yet apparent. Long after him the New England tradition persisted, and the best of subsequent American poetry belongs to it still. For a Robinson or a Frost or a T. S. Eliot (who is not in this book), Whitman might never have been.

Poe alone seems to stand aside from the succession, not because he came from the South, but because he was, in actual poetic achievement, inferior to any of the time. He is a singular, striking, tragic and important figure, but, as a poet, he is the inferior even of Longfellow. But he is far more important than Longfellow for what he once called 'the mad pride of intellectuality' in himself. In him it was the pride of a Lucifer. He had the intellectuality of a New England without its traditional restraint; a restraint which came chiefly from the depth and austerity of its nature-worship, or nature-fear. Not so with Poe. Perhaps because the South from which he came is different, by the whole climate of a continent, from the North. This fundamental awe of Nature was utterly foreign to him. Nature has no place in his work; not only are his landscapes purely artificial, glitteringly mechanical, but his men and women are abstracts, idols, symbols, anything but living flesh and blood. They are either mechanisms, or disembodied spiritual essences.

Because he was isolated from the one tough tradition: a little seed fallen far from the grim old parent trunk, in a warmer earth, he sprouted fantastically. His intellectuality became hypertrophied; it became indeed 'a mad pride.' But he had no roots, and he withered away. It is the

very lack of real communion with his own continent which made him the darling of another. All that he had could be transferred, without diminution, to Europe; but not all that he was. Only a portion of that passed into his familiar work. His real potentialities must be imagined from sparse and scattered indications. His destiny was to anticipate the decay of the New England tradition. Its doom of disintegration could work freely and swiftly in him, to a unique luxuriance of decay and death.

[*April*, 1928.]

THE END OF HERMAN MELVILLE

THE END OF HERMAN MELVILLE

In 1851 Herman Melville published *Moby Dick*: in the next five years *Pierre*, which was received with cold hostility, *Israel Potter* and the *Piazza Tales*. Then, to all intents and purposes, there was silence until his death, which did not come till thirty-five years later, in 1891.

The silence of a great writer needs to be listened to. If he has proved his genius, then his silence is an utterance, and one of no less moment than his speech. It is easy to talk of flagging creative energy; but men are not given the power of the word by some capricious daemon who touches their lips now to leave them dumb hereafter. The silence of a writer who has the vision that Melville revealed in *Moby Dick* and *Pierre* is not an accident without adequate cause: and our feeling that silence was the only appropriate epilogue to Melville's masterpiece is the form of our instinctive recognition that the adequate cause was there. After *Moby Dick* there was, in a sense, nothing to be said, just as after *King Lear* there seemed nothing for Shakespeare to say. Shakespeare, who was greater than Melville, did find another utterance in *Antony and Cleopatra:* then he too was silent. For, whatever names we may give to the 'romantic' plays of his final period, and however high the praises we sincerely heap upon them, they belong to another order and have a significance of another kind than the great tragedies. They are, essentially, the work of a man who has nothing

more to *say*, but who is artist and genius enough at last to contrive a method of saying even that.

Herman Melville could not do that, but then nobody save Shakespeare has been able to work that miracle. Probably Melville knew exactly what Shakespeare had achieved in the faint, far reflection of *The Tempest*, for in the *Battle-pieces and other Poems* (1866) with which he made scarce so much as a ripple in his own silence, is this strangely irrelevant verse on Shakespeare:

> No utter surprise can come to him
> Who reaches Shakespeare's core;
> That which we seek and shun is there—
> Man's final lore.

That is the highest claim ever made for Shakespeare, and the truest. It was made by one who had a right to speak, *en connaissance de cause:* for *Moby Dick* belongs to the same order as *Macbeth* and *King Lear;* it is inspired by the same knowledge and disturbed by the same tremors; it is, as they are, superhuman. It contains, as they do, the terrible and tremendous discovery made by a man big enough to take the risks and pay the price for 'man's final lore.' Melville knew where Shakespeare had been: no doubt he also knew where Shakespeare at last arrived, but he could not communicate those mysterious fain echoes of a certitude—that certitude 'which we seek and shun'—which are gathered together into *The Tempest*.

Yet Melville was trying to say more during his long

silence. How much he struggled with his dumbness we cannot say: perhaps during most of those thirty-five years he acquiesced in it. But something was at the back of his mind, haunting him, and this something he could not utter. If we handle the clues carefully we may reach a point from which we too may catch a glimpse of it; but then, by the nature of things, we shall be unable to utter what we see. We can only indicate the clues. They are to be found, one at the beginning and one at the end of the silence. *Pierre* is at the beginning. It is, judged by the standards which are traditional in estimating a 'work of art,' a complete failure. The story is naïve, amateurish, melodramatic, wildly improbable, altogether unreal. Let those who are persuaded that a novel is a good story and nothing more avoid *Pierre*. But those who feel that the greatest novels are something quite different from a good story should seek it out: to them it will be strange and fascinating, and they will understand why its outward semblance is clumsy and puerile. Melville is trying to reveal a mystery: he is trying to show that the completely good man is doomed to complete disaster on earth, and he is trying to show at the same time that this must be so, and that it ought to be so. The necessity of that 'ought to be so' can be interpreted in two ways: as Melville calls them, horologically or chronometrically. Horologically, that is, estimated by our local and earthly time-pieces, the disaster of the good ought to be so, because there is no room for unearthly perfection on earth: chronometrically, that is estimated by the unvarying recorder of the absolute,

it ought to be so because it is a working out, a manifestation, of the absolute, though hidden, harmony of the ideal and the real. In other words, Melville was trying to reveal anew the central mystery of the Christian religion.

He did not succeed. How could he succeed? Nobody understood *Pierre*, apparently nobody had even a glimmering understanding of it. And the thirty-five years of silence began. At the extreme end of them, moved perhaps by a premonition of coming death, Melville wrote another 'story.' *Billy Budd* is carefully dated: it was begun on November 16, 1888, the rewriting began on March 2, 1889, and it was finished on April 19, 1891. In the following September Melville was dead. With the mere fact of the long silence in our minds we cannot help regarding *Billy Budd* as the last will and spiritual testament of a man of genius. We could not help expecting this, if we have any imaginative understanding. Of course, if we are content to dismiss, in our minds if not in our words, the man of genius as mad, there is no need to trouble. Someone is sure to have told us that *Billy Budd*, like *Pierre*, is a tissue of *naïveté* and extravagance: that will be enough. And, truly, *Billy Budd is* like *Pierre*, startlingly, terribly like. Once more Melville is telling the story of the inevitable and utter disaster of the good and trying to convey to us that this must be so and ought to be so—chronometrically and horologically. He is trying, as it were with his final breath, to reveal the knowledge that has been haunting him—that these things must be so and not otherwise.

Billy Budd is a foretopman, pressed out of the merchant service into the King's Navy in the year of the Nore mutiny. He is completely good, not with the sickly goodness of self-conscious morality, but as one born into earthly paradise—strong, young, manly, loyal, brave, unsuspecting, admired by his officers and adored by his shipmates. And he is hated by the master-at-arms, the policeman of the lower deck. Claggart hates him, simply because he is Billy Budd, with the instinctive and ineffaceable hatred of the evil for the good. Melville is careful to explain that there is no reason whatever for his hatred, he puts it deliberately before us as naked and elemental—the clash of absolutes. Claggart is subtle and cool, he works quietly, and he also is a man of courage. He involves Billy Budd in the thin semblance of revolutionary mutiny. No more is possible, Billy Budd being what he is, and the semblance is almost transparent; Claggart knows the risk he is taking in denouncing the foretopman to Captain Vere, who has remarked and admired him. The master-at-arms deliberately risks his own life in order to destroy his enemy's. He risks it, and loses it, for in the privacy of his own cabin the captain confronts the accuser with his victim and in a flash of anger Budd strikes the master-at-arms dead. This moment in the story is unearthly.

But Billy Budd is doomed: he has killed his officer in time of war. The captain who understands and loves him presides over the court-martial, and Budd is con-

demned to be hanged at dawn. Before dawn the crew is piped to quarters.

Billy stood facing aft. At the penultimate moment, his words, his only ones, words wholly unobstructed in the utterance, were these—'God bless Captain Vere!' Syllables so unanticipated coming from one with the ignominious hemp about his neck—a conventional felon's benediction directed aft towards the quarters of honour; syllables, too, delivered in the clear melody of a singing bird on the point of launching from the twig, had a phenomenal effect, not unenhanced by the rare personal beauty of the young sailor, spiritualised now through late experiences so poignantly profound.

Without volition, as it were, as if indeed the ship's populace were the vehicles of some vocal current electric, with one voice, from alow and aloft, came a resonant echo—'God bless Captain Vere!' And yet at that instant Billy alone must have been in their hearts, even as he was in their eyes.

At the pronounced words and the spontaneous echo that voluminously rebounded them, Captain Vere, either through stoic self-control or a sort of momentary paralysis induced by emotional shock, stood erectly rigid as a musket in the ship-armourer's rack.

The hull, deliberately recovering from the periodic roll to leeward, was just regaining an even keel, when the last signal, the preconcerted dumb one, was given. At the same moment it chanced that the vapoury

fleece hanging low in the east was shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God seen in the mystical vision, and simultaneously therewith, watched by the wedged mass of upturned faces, Billy ascended; and ascending, took the full rose of the dawn.

In the pinioned figure, arrived at the yard end, to the wonder of all, no motion was apparent save that created by the slow roll of the hull, in moderate weather so majestic in a great ship heavy-cannoned.

That is the story, told with a strange combination of naïve simplicity and majestic serenity—the revelation of a mystery. It was Melville's final word, worthy of him, indisputably a passing beyond the tremendous nihilism of *Moby Dick*, to what may seem to some simple and childish, but to others will be wonderful and divine.

[1927.]

MARCEL PROUST

MARCEL PROUST

The most apparent phases in the evolution of literature are marked by a twofold change, a change in the intelligence and a change in the sensibility that find expression in it. The writers of a new period seem both to know and to feel more than the writers of the period before them; and these separate developments are bound together in the mesh of a continual interaction. They feel more because they know more. A man who has absorbed into his consciousness the aimless principle of Natural Selection develops a new nerve of sensibility which perceives, isolates, and emphasises a quality of aimlessness in all experience. Similarly, a man who has assimilated the Freudian psychology will respond with a new awareness to every manifestation of the sex impulse in the life before his eyes. Every atom of new knowledge that is really apprehended and digested by the mind serves, if not positively to enlarge, at least to rearrange the mechanism of the sensibility. In life we look for that which we know and feel that for which we are prepared. The logicians assure us that it is impossible to know or feel anything besides.

But these epoch-making changes in the intelligence and the sensibility, though they mark the historical advance of one period upon another, and serve to distinguish phases of the general consciousness of the literature into which it is projected, do not necessarily mark advance in the quality of the literature itself. The

changed sensibility will respond to many elements in experience which have hitherto passed unnoticed; it will emphasise, and may easily over-emphasise them. It will be induced to fasten upon a new truth of fact—as, for example, the ubiquity of the sex impulse under the strangest disguises—and to neglect old truths of fact which are not less true because they are familiar—as, for example, that the disguises which the sex-impulse is compelled to assume are essential to civilisation. So that when we leave the historical or evolutionary aspect of literature for literature itself, the significance of a change in the general intelligence and sensibility becomes dependent upon the degree of comprehensiveness that has been reached after the change. An extension of the sensibility has in itself no literary value; and, even when the creative alchemy of art has intervened, the expression of a new emotion will be far less significant than the expression of a comprehensive attitude to life, into which the new perceptions have been absorbed.

The final purpose of literature remains 'to see life steadily and see it whole'; but the definition is insufficient because it may equally be applied to the scientist or the philosopher. The writer sees and re-creates the quality of life as a whole, the quality of experience being precisely the element which is ignored by philosophy and science. Only in so far as the extension of the sensibility which comes with an advance in knowledge is made to heighten the perception of the quality of experience as a whole can it have a positive literary value. By the aid of

the new psychology we may be able to detect the working of the sex impulse in an incident of life where we did not previously suspect it; but this power is useless to the writer unless it enables him to seize more completely the unique quality of the incident, to compass its particularity, as it were, on another side, and so make his grasp of it firmer. If he imagines that this new aspect is the whole of the incident, he is merely indulging in the simplification of science. An extension of the sensibility has positive literary value only when it is a means towards the fuller penetration of the material of literature, which is the quality of our experience. We may perceive this quality in a new relation; but this new relation does not supersede the old familiar ones, it only helps to complete them. When a young man of eighteen suddenly develops a passion for exquisite clothes and beautiful ties, to say it is a manifestation of the sex impulse is true; it may indeed be for the biologist a complete truth, but for the writer it is a fragmentary and untransmuted fact. Unless he combines it with a hundred other perceptions—of the boy's desire to be beautiful, to be unobtrusive, to be independent, to be ideal—so that it endorses and intensifies them, he is an inferior man of science instead of (as he often imagines) a superior writer. But if the new faculty of perception is brought into harmony with the old ones, if the new relation in which the quality of experience is perceived does complete and not merely supersede the familiar relations, it changes them all; and when this new complex of perceptions is expressed

in a work of literature, the work will be unfamiliar, however great may be its comprehensiveness and truth. Only as we persevere with it and accustom ourselves to the mechanism of the sensibility expressed in it, will its strangeness begin to disappear.

Whatever may have been our final judgment on the strange novel of M. Marcel Proust, *Du Côté de chez Swann*, which appeared in the year before the war—and the book at least had this obviously in common with a great work of literature, that it lent itself to judgment on many different planes—the persistent element in all our changing opinions was that it marked the arrival of a new sensibility. We were being made aware in new ways, induced to perceive existence in new relations. We seemed to be drawn by a strong and novel enchantment to follow the writer down the long and misty avenues of his consciousness to the discovery of a forgotten childhood. And it was not as though his compelling us to enter into and share the process of his self-exploration was accidental; it was most deliberate. Whatever might be his underlying purpose M. Proust was not in the least like an artist who should leave all his tentative lines of his discarded sketches upon the paper.

The book opened with a description of the hypothetical writer (who might be more or less than M. Proust himself, but whom we shall for brevity's sake identify with him) asleep and waking in the night. In the effort to identify the room in which he is, he passes through a series of memories awakened by the sensation

of that effort, and he proceeds to describe what is for him the archetype of that sensation, namely, his anxiety when a child at going to bed without his mother's kiss. From this central point he explores the past and discovers the figure of Swann, a friend of the family, whose presence at dinner it was which prevented him from having at all, or having fully, the kiss without which sleep was impossible. He explores all the avenues of memory until they are exhausted, and he has given us a picture, vague in some places and astonishingly precise in others, of a childish universe in which Swann is the mysterious hero, and his mother and grandmother the guardian angels. That picture, like the vision of the robber Golo which came from the magic-lantern given him to keep his night terrors away, disappears abruptly, and the grown man appears again. He is in his home in Paris, dipping a *madeleine* into a cup of tea. Again the sensation, as he puts the cake into his mouth, is mysteriously familiar. He tries to empty his mind of everything else and to leave his consciousness free for the memory concealed in the sensation to emerge. It returns from the past; it is the taste of the sop of *madeleine* which his aunt used to give him. He remembers the moments; he remembers the the room; and gradually he begins to recreate another aspect of the past—his aunt Léonie's house at Combray, Françoise the faithful servant, and, above all, his walks 'du côté de chez Swann,' on that side of the town where the road skirted Swann's park. The other side, the other hemisphere of his world, is 'du côté de Guermantes,'

where the road, never followed to its august destination, leads eventually to the chateau of the Duc de Guermantes, the great notable of the countryside and one of the greatest aristocrats in all France. Most of the boy's walking is done on Swann's side, however, though most of his dreaming concerns the other. Nevertheless, 'chez Swann' is hardly more accessible than the mysterious Guermantes; for Swann has made a scandalous marriage, since which the boy's parents have never visited nor allowed him to visit the house. Only one day, when Swann and his family are supposed to be away, he and his father and grandfather take the short cut which runs through Swann's park; and the boy sees a freckled girl—Swann's daughter—who pokes out her tongue at him. He also hears her name called out: 'Gilberte!'

Again there is an abrupt change in the narrative. The story of Swann's love for the mistress he has married, Odette de Crécy, is told at length. At first it seems to have no relation to the consciousness of the narrator; it must have taken place before he was even born. But, although the history of Swann and Odette cannot have been obtained by any exploration of the mental *Hinterland* such as yielded the first part of the story, it becomes apparent that the behaviour of Swann's mind during his love affair is governed by the same laws that operated in the writer's rediscovery of his childhood. While Swann's passion for Odette grows, hers for him cools; but in the midst of his agony his knowledge and memory of their love seems to have dissolved. *Sentit et excru-*

ciatur; but what he has lost he cannot tell until one night he goes to a musical evening in the Faubourg St. Germain. If we had to choose a single episode from M. Proust's enormous book as a sample of the whole, it would be twenty odd pages describing this evening. In a sense they are too good to be truly representative; but every quality that can be found in them will be found in a more or less concentrated form throughout the work. But whereas in the rest of the book they are often, as it were, held in solution, here they are solidified into crystals. That complete projection of the sensibility which distinguishes great literature is here beautifully accomplished. Since it is impossible to continue the description of M. Proust's book at length, we may try to give an account of this episode.

Swann, the darling of the most exclusive Parisian society, preoccupied with his love for Odette, has given up frequenting it. When he enters Mme. de Ste. Euverte's house on this evening, what was once familiar has become strange to him. He finds himself in an alien universe. Each one of the multitude of lackeys on the stairs, each one, from the first who 'semblait témoigner du mépris pour sa personne, et des égards pour son chapeau,' appears to him mysterious. At last, with an accumulated sense of strangeness, he enters the salon. He sees a number of once familiar friends, like himself, wearing monocles. But to-night their monocles, instead of passing unnoticed, are peculiar: General de Froberville's seems like 'a wound that it was glorious to receive, but indecent

to display;' the Marquis de Forestelle's 'a superfluous cartilage whose presence was inexplicable and material precious;' while M. de Palancy's 'grosse tête de carpe aux yeux ronds . . . avait l'air de transporter seulement avec lui un fragment accidentel et peut-être purement symbolique de son aquarium.' By these curious and striking images we are made to feel how utterly foreign to Swann is become his once habitual environment. He stands near by a fashionable lady, Mme. de Franquetot, and her country cousin, Mme. de Cambremer, and watches their strange contortions to mark their interest in the music. Then the feelings of Mme. de Gallardon, a connection of the Guermantes, are described. Then the young Princesse de Laumes, soon to be the Duchesse de Guermantes, enters. Mme. de Gallardon makes a not too successful attempt to enter into conversation with her and is snubbed. M. de Froberville tries to be introduced to Mme. de Cambremer's daughter-in-law. The Princesse de Laumes shows her contempt for the princes of the Empire, and catches sight of Swann. He refuses her invitation to Guermantes, introduces Froberville to young Mme. de Cambremer, and longs to escape from this place 'ou Odette ne viendrait jamais, où personne, où rien ne la connaissait, d'où elle était entièrement absente.'

Suddenly the pianist begins a sonata, and Swann hears a little musical phrase to which he and Odette had listened together in the salon where they used continually to meet.

Et avant que Swann eût eu le temps de comprendre, et de se dire: 'C'est la petite phrase de la sonate de Vinteuil, n'écoutons pas!' tous ses souvenirs du temps où Odette était éprise de lui, et qu'il avait réussi jusqu'à ce jour de maintenir invisibles dans les profondeurs de son être, trompés par ce brusque rayon du temps d'amour qu'ils crurent revenu, s'étaient réveillés, et à tire d'aile étaient remontés lui chanter éperdûment, sans pitié pour son infortune présente, les refrains oubliés du bonheur.

All the particularity of his love returns with a stab; in a moment of time he relives every incident of it.

Et Swann aperçut, immobile en face de ce bonheur revécu, un malheureux qui lui fit pitié parce qu'il ne le reconnut pas tout de suite, si bien qu'il dut baisser les yeux pour qu'on ne vît pas qu'ils étaient pleins de larmes. C'était lui-même.

Quand il l'eut compris, sa pitié cessa, mais il était jaloux de l'autre lui-même qu'elle avait aimé, il fut jaloux de ceux dont il s'était dit souvent sans trop souffrir, 'elle les aime peut-être,' maintenant qu'il avait échangé l'idée vague d'aimer, dans laquelle il n'y a pas d'amour, contre les pétales du chrysanthème et l' 'en tête' de la Maison d'or qui, eux, en étaient pleins. Puis sa souffrance devenant trop vive, il passa sa main sur son front, laissa tomber son monocle, en essuya le verre. Et sans doute s'il s'était vu à ce moment-là, il eut ajouté à la collection de ceux qu'il avait distingués

le monocle qu'il déplaçait comme une pensée importune et sur la face embuée duquel, avec un mouchoir, il cherchait à effacer les soucis.

After the episode which culminates in this incident, the narrative returns, apparently for good, to the growing consciousness of the boy. His childish love for Swann's daughter, his visit to the Brittany sea-side at Balbec where he meets another love, Albertine, and one of the less fashionable but authentic Guermantes, Mme. de Villeparisis and her nephew, Robert de Saint-Loup, who becomes his intimate friend; the death of his grandmother; his entry into the central shrine of the Guermantes by dining with the Duchess herself; his encounter with another Guermantes, M. de Charlus—these incidents are the bare skeleton of the three following volumes. But they are treated with such a wealth of psychological detail that a summary of the incidents, however lengthy, could only be misleading.

We may leave aside provisionally the problem of M. Proust's deeper intention, confining ourselves to the suggestion that his literary purpose has perhaps changed or developed in the course of his narrative; for if, as it seems, his main object is to record the growth of a modern consciousness, the brilliant episode of Swann's love affair which can never have been present to that consciousness, is, in spite of its value in itself, an alien element. Moreover, the long and masterly description of the dinner-party at the Duchesse de Guermantes also exists

independently rather than in relation to the young man's consciousness. He was, in fact, present at the dinner-party, but we do not feel his presence there; we do not perceive the company through his mind. And this objection will hold good still, even if we regard the scheme of the narrative so far as built upon successive contrasts between the dream and the reality of Swann and the dream and the reality of Guermantes. M. Proust seems at times to waver undecided between the psychological history of a modern mentality and an anatomy of modern society.

Nevertheless, it is better to admit that on a canvas so large a strict subordination of every part to the literary purpose of the whole is not to be expected. We are conscious that a single sensibility pervades all the parts, even though the power of projecting it so completely as in the episodes of the musical evening and the death of the grandmother is intermittent. And this sensibility is our chief concern. The underlying motive which animates, or law which governs it, is that which appears so plainly in the first volume—the dependence of memory and mental life as a whole upon association. Without the taste of *madeleine*, the boy's past at Combray, without the *petite phrase*, Swann's knowledge of the realities of his love for Odette, would have been sunk in the dark backward and abysm of time. This psychological fact at once governs the conduct of the narrative itself in so far as it is presented in terms of a single consciousness, and determines the conduct of the various characters

who appear in it. More than this, the act of penetrating through some present circumstance to a fragment of past experience which it seems to hold strangely concealed behind it, is represented as a consummation of personality. To enter into complete possession of the past by means of such present circumstances is to possess oneself wholly; they are, M. Proust says, the door that opens upon *la vraie vie*. This conviction of the writer can be interpreted in two ways, according as we regard the whole narrative as the history of the consciousness of a writer, or as the development of an extreme but none the less typical modern mind. In one of the few indications of his own plan, M. Proust seems to declare that his aim is to describe the evolution of a literary sensibility.

> Si en descendant l'escalier je ravivais les soirs de Doncières, quand nous fûmes arrivés dans la rue brusquement, la nuit presque complète où le brouillard semblait avoir éteint les reverbères, qu'on ne distinguait, bien faibles, que de tout près, me ramena à je ne sais quelle arrivée le soir à Combray, quand la ville n'était encore éclairée que de loin en loin, et qu'on y tâtonnait dans une obscurité humide, tiède et sainte de crèche, à peine étoilée çà et là d'un lumignon qui ne brillait plus qu'un cierge. Entre cette année d'ailleurs incertaine de Combray et les soirs à Rivebelle revus tout à l'heure au-dessus des rideaux, quelles différences! J'éprouvais à les percevoir un enthousiasme qui aurait pu être fécond si j'étais resté

seul et m'aurait évité ainsi le détour de bien des années inutiles par lesquelles j'allais encore passer avant que se déclarât *la vocation invisible dont cette ouvrage est l'histoire.*

On the other hand, the description of his vain endeavour to seize the significance of three strange-familiar trees seen while driving in Mme. de Villeparisis' carriage at Balbac suggests a larger scope to this activity of the mind.

Ce plaisir (the delight of penetrating their significance) dont l'objet n'était que pressenti, que j'avais à créer moi-même, je ne l'éprouvais que de rares fois, mais à chacune d'elles il me semblait que les choses qui s'étaient passées dans l'intervalle n'avaient guère d'importance et qu'en m'attachant à sa seule réalité je pourrais enfin commencer une vraie vie. . . . Je vis les arbres s'éloigner en agitant leurs bras désespérés, semblant me dire: Ce que tu n'apprends pas de nous aujourd'hui tu ne le sauras jamais. Si tu nous laisses retomber au fond de ce chemin d'ou nous cherchions nous hisser jusq'à toi, toute une partie de toi-même que nous t'apportions tombera pour jamais au néant. En effet, si dans la suite je retrouvai le genre de plaisir et d'inquiétude que je venais de sentir encore une fois, et si un soir—trop tard, mais pour toujours—je m'attachai à lui, de ces arbres eux-mêmes en revanche je ne sus jamais ce qu'ils avaient voulu m'apporter ni où je les avais vus.

> Et quand la voiture ayant bifurqué, je leur tournai le dos et cessai de les voir . . . j'étais triste comme si je venais de perdre un ami, de mourir à moi-même, de renier un mort ou de méconnaitre un Dieu.

Perhaps we may find in the reference to the final and enduring penetration of the hidden reality a hint of the conclusion of the book considered as the history of an 'invisible vocation.' It suggests that at the end we shall find the writer deliberately, and with all the resources of his will, concentrating upon that very sensation of reminiscence, the malaise at night in bed, with which *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* opens. Such a doubling of the consciousness upon itself would make a fittingly subtle finale to the subtlest of all modern psychological fictions, and present us at the last with a book which would be in essentials the story of its own creation. But for the moment it is sufficient to regard the writer's conviction of the supreme importance of these acts of penetration as dictated by the knowledge of his own vocation, as a declaration that the *vraie vie* is that to which the intuition of the writer has access, and rather as a deliberate placing of the literary consciousness at the summit of the mental hierarchy than an assertion that complete possession of the self by this means is the highest mortal end, the most perfect ascêsis, for all human beings.

What M. Proust undoubtedly does, however, is to represent this process of association as dominant in the mental lives of all men who can be said to live at all. A

writer's exclusive preoccupation with it is only a completer realisation of a tendency which distinguishes the higher grades of consciousness. It determines, for instance, Swann's attitude to Odette, and his decision to marry her really rests upon it. In more general terms, M. Proust regards the life of man as a perpetual effort to penetrate an unknown,—the mind of the woman he loves, the friend he admires, the society with which he is acquainted. This desire is, indeed, the very condition of love. 'Que nous croyions qu'un être participe à une vie inconnue où son amour nous ferait pénétrer, c'est de tout ce qu'exige l'amour pour naître, ce à quoi il tient le plus.' But this desire to penetrate the unknown of others is never satisfied. We live in perpetual illusion; the imagined friend, the imagined lover, the imagined society, the imagined reality, are never real. Suddenly, by a devious way, we hear of something said or done which cannot enter into our picture: we are shocked and pained, then we rebuild another picture, no less illusory, and imagine that this at least is true. This recurrent theme of perpetual disillusion, of impotent encounter with the unknown, may be called the philosophical background of the book, and from this angle we might regard it as a philosophical justification of the art of writing, presented through the history of a consciousness. For as the growing man turns away from the continual disillusion which is the only result of his attempt to penetrate the reality beyond himself, he more clearly sees that the only reality he can hope to master is his own experience. Thus to

enter into complete possession of the past by the method of which *Du Côté de chez Swann* is an example is presented not only as the goal to which an 'invisible vocation' was calling a particular person, but in fact also as the highest end of man, *la vraie vie* indeed. In so far as literature is based upon that method of evoking the past through an associated symbol (and it certainly is one of the chief elements in literary creation) it is, according to this underlying philosophy, the supreme activity of life.

This concealed motive it is which differentiates M. Proust's book from all that have gone before. The metaphysician might call it the history of a solipsist. But such a definition would be as misleading as all other attempts to find a philosophical definition for a particular work of literature. For, though M. Proust is in a sense applying a theory to experience, he is doing so by the strikingly novel method of describing the process by which the theory was gradually and inevitably formed in the consciousness which applies it. If, therefore, M. Proust's book ends, as we believe it will end, in its own beginning, it will have a unity—in spite of the apparent discrepancy of certain of the parts—of a kind which has never been achieved in a work of literature before: it will be the first book known to me which has been the psychological history of its own creation and a philosophical justification of its own necessity.[1] It will belong in this respect to a new order of literature. And that is

[1]This essay was written in 1921. There is now, alas, no hope either of proving or confuting the prophecy.

what we already vaguely feel as we read it. It is something more than a book in an unfamiliar language, more than a fiction of greater psychological subtlety than we are accustomed to. For better or worse, it marks the emergence of a new kind, the arrival of a new sensibility.

That is its uncommon significance. To find an approximate parallel in the history of modern literature we should probably have to go back to Rousseau. There we should discover the paradox of a man not primarily a literary artist whose work revolutionised the literature of the next hundred years. M. Proust likewise is not primarily a literary artist. Nothing could be more significant than the length of the process of his finding his 'invisible vocation.' Like Rousseau, he is ultimately compelled to writing as a satisfaction for his sensibility. The chief point of difference is that where Rousseau was compelled to express his sensibility upon alien themes, M. Proust has been in the privileged position of one who could afford to wait for the truly inevitable occasion. Still, the only work of literature with which *à la Recherche du Temps Perdu* could profitably be compared is the *Confessions of Jean-Jacques*. There is a real likeness between the driving impulses at work in these books, and a careful comparison might enable us to determine the more important differences between the new sensibility of the eighteenth, and the new sensibility of the twentieth century. At all events, a century of science has passed between. M. Proust is not preoccupied with finding God, but with finding *la vraie vie*, though a previous quotation

shows that where Rousseau always did, he sometimes does identify them. But more apparently still, a century of scientific psychology, of astronomical physics, of the biology of Natural Selection, has intervened. The last shreds of anthropocentrism have been worn away. Where Rousseau felt his own isolation and was tormented by the discrepancy between his dream and the reality, and could not reconcile himself to his isolation or his torment, M. Proust can. He accepts these conditions, he formulates them as an actual law of human existence; and the acceptance has been incorporated into the very mechanism of his sensibility. He discerns in the world that which he feels in himself; he is a Rousseau to whom some of the hidden causes of his perplexity have been made plain.

And the detailed knowledge of a century of applied science is at his fingers' ends to help him refine and express his sensibility. How many times does he use the simile of a camera to make more apparent the working of two planes of consciousness! 'Ce qu'on prend en présence de l'être aimé n'est un cliché négatif, on le developpe plus tard.' By that means he expresses in a sentence a truth which lies behind a whole section of the fifth volume, 'Les Intermittences du Cœur,' where for the first time realising the loss of his beloved grandmother, months after her death, the young man learns that the uniqueness of our most precious experience eludes us till the opportunity of it is lost for ever. Again, when the boy, occupied with the anxiety of obtaining his mother's kiss, waits nervously at the dinner table—'comme un

malade, grâce à un anésthésique, assiste avec pleine lucidité à l'opération qu'on pratique sur lui, mais sans rien sentir, je pouvais me réciter des vers que j'aimais ou observer les efforts que mon grand'père faisait pour parler à Swann du duc d'Audiffret-Pasquier, sans que les premiers me fissent éprouver aucune émotion, les seconds aucune gaîté.' And on the same occasion, having to take the kiss in public, he had not even the time or the freedom of mind necessary 'pour porter à ce que je faisais cette attention des maniaques qui s'efforcent de ne pas penser à autre chose pendant qu'ils ferment une porte, pour pouvoir, quand l'incertitude maladive leur revient, lui opposer victorieusement le souvenir du moment où ils l'ont fermée.' And for a final example we may choose the part played by the Duchesse de Guermantes' tree, which needs to be fertilised by an insect, in the explication of the psychology of the closing pages of *Du Côté de Guermantes*, and the writer's declaration: 'Mes réflexions avaient suivi une pente que je décrirai plus tard et j'avais déjà tiré de la ruse apparente de fleurs une conséquence sur toute une partie inconsciente de l'œuvre littéraire.' Such are some of the typical contributions of the science of the nineteenth century towards the expression of a sensibility shaped by its larger knowledge.

But in endeavouring to analyse the singular impression which M. Proust's work makes upon us and to isolate the elements which produce the effect of novelty, in trying to investigate and assess its deeply-rooted originality, we are in danger of neglecting the more obvious qualities

of a book which exhibits at least as many beauties as it conceals. It needs no second reading to appreciate the subtlety of psychological observation, the ironic detachment of the writer's vision of high Parisian society. If the dinner-party at the Guermantes is a masterpiece in a not wholly unfamiliar genre, in the description of the musical evening at Mme. de Ste. Euverte's the same lucid irony is perceptibly lifted to a higher plane and made to subserve a complex emotional effect. And though the biting wit which flashes home again and again through the narrative of *Du Côté de Guermantes* is of the very highest order in its kind, though the semi-satirical portrait of the *bien pensant* ambassador, M. de Norpois, at the beginning of *À l'Ombre des Jeunes filles* is perfect, they yield in impressiveness to the certainty of the single touch with which, in the description of the grandmother's illness, M. Proust sounds the note of the tragedy of death. When the grandmother has had a paralytic stroke in the Champs Elysées, and the boy suddenly sees 'son chapeau, son visage, son manteau dérangés par la main de l'ange invisible avec lequel elle avait lutté,' we feel we are in the presence of a great writer indeed. And besides the command of tragic simplicity and wit, M. Proust has also the gift of humour. To appreciate this picture of life in the kitchen it is necessary to know that it was an established convention that the servants should not be disturbed at their lunch.

Déjà depuis un quart d'heure, ma mère qui n'usait

probablement pas des mêmes mesures que Françoise pour apprécier la longueur du déjeûner de celle-ci, disait:

'Mais qu'est-ce qu'ils peuvent bien faire, voilà plus de deux heures qu'ils sont à table.'

Et elle sonnait timidement trois ou quatre fois. Françoise, son valet de pied, le maître d'hôtel entendaient les coups de sonnette comme un appel et sans songer à venir, mais pourtant comme les premiers sons des instruments qui s'accordent quand un concert va bientôt recommencer et qu'on sent qu'il n'y aura plus que quelques minutes d'entr'acte. Aussi quand les coups commençant à se répéter et à deviner plus insistants, nos domestiques se mettaient a y prendre garde et estimant qu'ils n'avaient plus beaucoup de temps devant eux et que la reprise du travail était proche, à un tintement de sonnette un peu plus sonore que les autres, ils poussaient un soupir et prenant leur parti, le valet de pied descendait fumer une cigarette devant la porte, Françoise, après quelques reflexions sur nous, telles que 'ils ont surement la bougeotte,' montait ranger ses affaires dans son sixième, et le maître d'hôtel ayant été chercher du papier à lettres dans ma chambre expediait rapidement sa correspondance privée.

But it is not these qualities, rare and valuable as they are, which make *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* one of the most significant of contemporary works of literature. They are precious qualities, but they are in a sense super-

ficial, and they might be outweighed by the undoubted obscurity, the awkward complication of language, in large portions of the book. It is something much more than a dark narrative with frequent gleams of beauty; it is a book with at least one of the qualities of permanence, an animating soul. It is maintained by a high and subtle purpose, informed by a view of life as a whole, and because this secret fire glows steadily within it, we feel the radiance through the most forbidding pages long before we are able to detect its source. One consequence of this is that though M. Proust's language is sometimes alembicated to a point of grotesqueness, he has style; we might more exactly apply to him a phrase which he himself has aptly used of a great predecessor, Stendhal, and say that his work has *la grande ossature du style*, a thing of infinitely more importance than limpidity or beauty in the detail of expression. M. Proust's style, in this larger meaning, is as new and original as is the sensibility to which it owes its being.

[*July*, 1921.]

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A NOTE
ON THE ARRANGEMENT OF
THIS CATALOGUE

The main body or text of this list is arranged alphabetically under the names of AUTHORS. But, in addition, and for the convenience of readers, there will be found at the end two indexes. The first (page 31) is arranged numerically under the series numbers given to the volumes. The second (page 35) is arranged alphabetically under the titles of the books.

ANDERSON, Sherwood

HORSES AND MEN. Stories *No.* 54

'*Horses and Men* confirms our indebtedness to the publishers who are introducing his work here. It has a unity beyond that of its constant Middle West setting. A man of poetic vision, with an intimate knowledge of particular conditions of life, here looks out upon a world that seems singularly material only because he unflinchingly accepts its actualities.' *Morning Post*

ARMSTRONG, Martin

THE BAZAAR. Stories *No.* 77

'These stories have considerable range of subject, but in general they are stay-at-home tales, depicting cloistered lives and delicate, finely fibred minds. . . . Mr. Armstrong writes beautifully.' *Nation and Athenæum*

ATKINS, J. B.

SIDE SHOWS. Essays. With an introduction by JAMES BONE *No.* 78

Mr. J. B. Atkins was war correspondent in four wars, the London editor of a great English paper, then Paris correspondent of another, and latterly the editor of the *Spectator*. His subjects in *Side Shows* are briefly London and the sea.

BELLOC, Hilaire

SHORT TALKS WITH THE DEAD *No.* 79

In these essays Mr. Belloc attains his usual high level of pungent and witty writing. The subjects vary widely and include an imaginary talk with the spirits of Charles I, the barber of Louis XIV, and Napoleon, Venice, fakes, eclipses, Byron, and the famous dissertation on the Nordic Man.

BERCOVICI, Konrad

BETWEEN EARTH AND SKY. Stories of Gipsies. With an Introduction by A. E. COPPARD *No.* 117

Konrad Bercovici, through his own association with gipsies, together with a magical intuition of their lives, is able to give us some unforgettable pictures of those wanderers who, having no home anywhere, are at home everywhere.

BIERCE, Ambrose

CAN SUCH THINGS BE? Stories *No.* 1

'Bierce never wastes a word, never coins a too startling phrase; he secures his final effect, a cold thrill of fear, by a simple, yet subtle, realism. No anthology of short stories, limited to a score or so, would be complete without an example of his unique artistry.' *Morning Post*

THE EYES OF THE PANTHER. Stories *No.* 49

It is said that these tales were originally rejected by virtually every publisher in the country. Bierce was a strange man; in 1914, at the age of seventy-one, he set out for Mexico and has never been heard of since. His stories are as strange as his life, but this volume shows him as a master of his art.

THE MONK AND THE HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER.
Written by Ambrose Bierce in collaboration with Adolphe Danziger de Castro *No.* 34

'They are stories which the discerning are certain to welcome. They are evidence of very unusual powers, and when once they have been read the reader will feel himself impelled to dig out more from the same pen.' *Westminster Gazette*

BIRRELL, Augustine

MORE OBITER DICTA *No.* 140

'A volume delightful to read, packed with urbane and shrewd criticism, and distinguished by a pleasant vein of kindly humour.' *Daily Mail*

'Age has not wearied Mr. Birrell's humour; nor have the years condemned his whimsicality. He remains as delightful a companion as ever.' *Nation and Athenæum*

BOURNE, George

A FARMER'S LIFE *No.* 32

The life-story of a tenant-farmer of fifty years ago in which the author of *The Bettesworth Book* and *The Memoirs of a Surrey Labourer* draws on his memory for a picture of the everyday life of his immediate forbears, the Smiths, farmers and handicraft men, who lived and died on the border of Surrey and Hampshire.

BRAMAH, Ernest

THE WALLET OF KAI LUNG *No.* 18

'Something worth doing and done. . . . It was a thing intended, wrought out, completed and established. Therefore it was destined to endure, and, what is more important, it was a success.' *Hilaire Belloc*

KAI LUNG'S GOLDEN HOURS *No.* 16

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BRONTË, Emily

WUTHERING HEIGHTS *No.* 30

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BROWNE, Louis

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Here is a history which is more absorbing than any work of fiction. The author traces the beginnings of the Jewish race from the wandering Semitic races of Arabia, through interminable strife and conflict, slavery, oppression, expatriation, up to modern times.

BUTLER, Samuel

EREWHON. A Satire *No.* 11

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BUTLER, Samuel

THE NOTE BOOKS *No. 75*

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QUIS DESIDERIO . . . ?
RAMBLINGS IN CHEAPSIDE
THE AUNT, THE NIECES, AND THE DOG
HOW TO MAKE THE BEST OF LIFE
THE SANCTUARY OF MONTRIGONE
A MEDIEVAL GIRLS' SCHOOL
ART IN THE VALLEY OF SAAS
THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE

THE WAY OF ALL FLESH. A Novel *No. 10*

'It drives one almost to despair of English Literature when one sees so extraordinary a study of English life as Butler's posthumous *Way of All Flesh* making so little impression. Really, the English do not deserve to have great men.' *George Bernard Shaw*

CANOT, Theodore

MEMOIRS OF A SLAVE TRADER. Set down by BRANTZ MAYER and now edited by A. W. LAWRENCE *No. 126*

In 1854 a cosmopolitan adventurer, who knew Africa at the worst period of its history, dictated this sardonic account of piracy and mutiny, of battles with warships or rival traders, and of the fantastic lives of European and half-caste slavers on the West Coast.

CARDUS, Neville

DAYS IN THE SUN: A Cricketer's Book *No. 121*

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CARLETON, Captain George

MILITARY MEMOIRS (1672–1713). Edited by A. W. LAWRENCE *No.* 134

A cheerful sidelight on the war of the Spanish Succession, with a remarkable literary history. Johnson praised the book, Scott edited it, and then the critics declared it to be fiction and suggested Defoe or Swift as the author ; now it has come into its own again as one of the most vivid records of a soldier's actual experiences.

CLEMENTS, Rex

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COPPARD, A. E.

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COYLE, Kathleen

LIV. A Novel. With an Introduction by REBECCA WEST *No.* 87

'*Liv* is a short novel, but more subtly suggesting beauty and movement than many a longer book. Liv is a young Norwegian girl whose father is recently dead. She is engaged, half against her will, to a young man, a neighbour ; but she desires above all things to go to Paris to "see life." . . . There is something cool and rare about this story ; the reader finds himself turning back to re-read pages that must not be forgotten.' *Times Literary Supplement*

DAVIES, W. H.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A SUPER-TRAMP. With a Preface by G. BERNARD SHAW *No.* 3

Printed as it was written, it is worth reading for its literary style alone. The author tells us with inimitable quiet modesty of how he begged and stole his way across America and through England and Wales until his travelling days were cut short by losing his right foot while attempting to 'jump' a train.

LATER DAYS. A pendant to *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* *No.* 48

'The self-portrait is given with disarming, mysterious, and baffling directness, and the writing has the same disarmingness and simpleness.' *Observer*

A POET'S PILGRIMAGE *No.* 56

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DELEDDA, GRAZIA

THE MOTHER. A Novel. With an Introduction by D. H. LAWRENCE. (Awarded the Nobel Prize 1928.) *No.* 105

An unusual book, both in its story and its setting in a remote Sardinian hill village, half civilised and superstitious. The action of the story takes place so rapidly and the actual drama is so interwoven with the mental conflict, and all so forced by circumstances, that it is almost Greek in its simple and inevitable tragedy.

DE MAUPASSANT

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DE SELINCOURT, Hugh

THE CRICKET MATCH. A Story *No.* 108

Through the medium of a cricket match the author endeavours to give a glimpse of life in a Sussex village. First we have a bird's-eye view at dawn of the village nestling under the Downs ; then we see the players awaken in all the widely different circumstances of their various lives, pass the morning, assemble on the field, play their game, united for a few hours, as men should be, by a common purpose – and at night disperse.

DOS PASSOS, John

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DOUGLAS, George

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DUNSTERVILLE, Major-General L. G.

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FARSON, Negley

SAILING ACROSS EUROPE. With an Introduction by FRANK MORLEY *No.* 111

A voyage of six months in a ship, its one and only cabin measuring 8 feet by 6 feet, up the Rhine, down the Danube, passing from one to the other by the half-forgotten Ludwig's Canal. To think of and plan such a journey was a fine imaginative effort and to write about it interestingly is no mean accomplishment.

FAUSSET, Hugh I'Anson

TENNYSON. A critical study *No.* 124

Mr. Fausset's study of Tennyson's qualities as poet, man, and moralist is by implication a study of some of the predominant characteristics of the Victorian age. His book, however, is as pictorial as it is critical, being woven, to quote *The Times*, 'like an arras of delicate colour and imagery.'

FLAUBERT, Gustave

MADAME BOVARY. Translated by ELEANOR MARX-AVELING. With an Introduction by PERCY LUBBOCK. *No.* 144

'. . . It remains perpetually the novel of all novels which the criticism of fiction cannot overlook ; as soon as ever we speak of the principles of the art we must be prepared to engage with Flaubert. There is no such book as his *Bovary* ; for it is a novel in which the subject stands firm and clear, without the least shade of ambiguity to break the line which bounds it.' PERCY LUBBOCK *in The Craft of Fiction*

FORMAN, Henry James

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GARNETT, Edward

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GARNETT, Mrs. R. S.

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GAUGIN, Paul

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The confessions of genius are usually startling; and Gaugin's *Journals*, now made accessible to the wider world, are no exception. He exults in his power to give free rein to his savage spirit, tearing the shawl from convention's shoulders with a gesture as unscrupulous as it is Rabelaisian.

GIBBS, J. Arthur

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In his own experiences as a soldier Stephen Graham has conserved the half-forgotten emotions of a nation in arms. Above all, he makes us feel the stark brutality and horror of actual war, the valour which is more than valour, and the disciplined endurance which is human and therefore the more terrifying.

HEARN, Lafcadio

GLEANINGS IN BUDDHA-FIELDS *No.* 42

A book which is readable from the first page to the last, and is full of suggestive thought, the essays on Japanese religious belief calling for special praise for the earnest spirit in which the subject is approached.

HEARN, Lafcadio

GLIMPSES OF UNFAMILIAR JAPAN. First Series *No.* 57

Most books written about Japan have been superficial sketches of a passing traveller. Of the inner life of the Japanese we know practically nothing, their religion, superstitions, ways of thought. Lafcadio Hearn reveals something of the people and their customs as they are.

GLIMPSES OF UNFAMILIAR JAPAN. Second Series *No.* 58

Sketches by an acute observer and a master of English prose, of a Nation in transition – of the lingering remains of Old Japan, to-day only a memory, of its gardens, its beliefs, customs, gods and devils, of its wonderful kindliness and charm – and of the New Japan, struggling against odds towards new ideals.

KWAIDAN. Stories *No.* 44

The marvellous tales which Mr. Hearn has told in this volume illustrate the wonder-living tendency of the Japanese. The stories are of goblins, fairies and sprites, with here and there an adventure into the field of unveiled supernaturalism.

OUT OF THE EAST *No.* 43

Mr. Hearn has written many books about Japan ; he is saturated with the essence of its beauty, and in this book the light and colour and movement of that land drips from his pen in every delicately conceived and finely written sentence.

HEYWARD, Du Bose

PORGY. A Tale *No.* 85

This fascinating book gives a vivid and intimate insight into the lives of a group of American negroes, from whom Porgy stands out, rich in humour and tragedy. The author's description of a hurricane is reminiscent in its power.

HILDEBRAND, Arthur Sturges

BLUE WATER. The story of an ocean voyage *No.* 36

This book gives the real feeling of life on a small cruising yacht ; the nights on deck with the sails against the sky, long fights with head winds by mountainous coasts to safety in forlorn little island ports, and constant adventure free from care.

HOUSMAN, Laurence

ANGELS AND MINISTERS, AND OTHER PLAYS. *No.* 17

Imaginary portraits of political characters done in dialogue – Queen Victoria, Disraeli, Gladstone, Parnell, Joseph Chamberlain and Woodrow Wilson.

'It is all so good that one is tempted to congratulate Mr. Housman on a true masterpiece.' *Times*

HUDDLESTON, Sisley

FRANCE AND THE FRENCH. A study *No.* 86

'There has been nothing of its kind published since the war. His book is a repository of facts marshalled with judgment ; as such it should assist in clearing away a whole maze of misconceptions and prejudices, and serve as a sort of pocket encyclopædia of modern France.' *Times Literary Supplement*

HUDSON, W. H.

MEN, BOOKS AND BIRDS: Letters to a Friend. With Notes, some Letters, and an Introduction by MORLEY ROBERTS *No.* 112

An important collection of letters from the naturalist to his friend, literary executor and fellow author, Morley Roberts, covering a period of twenty-five years.

JEWETT, Sarah Orne

THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS. Stories *No.* 28

'The young student of American literature in the far distant future will take up this book and say "a masterpiece !" as proudly as if he had made it. It will be a message in a universal language – the one message that even the scythe of Time spares.' *From the Preface by* WILLA CATHER

JONES, Henry Festing

DIVERSIONS IN SICILY. Travel impressions *No.* 120

Shortly before his sudden and unexpected death, Mr. Festing Jones chose out *Diversions in Sicily* for reprinting in the Travellers' Library from among his three books of mainly Sicilian sketches and studies. These chapters, as well as any that he wrote, recapture the wisdom, charm and humour of their author.

JOYCE, James

DUBLINERS. A volume of Stories *No.* 14

A collection of fifteen short stories by the author of *Ulysses*. They are all of them brave, relentless and sympathetic pictures of Dublin life ; realistic, perhaps, but not crude ; analytical, but not repugnant. No modern writer has greater significance than Mr. Joyce, whose conception and practice of the short story is certainly unique and certainly vital.

KALLAS, Aino

THE WHITE SHIP. Stories. With an Introduction by JOHN GALSWORTHY *No.* 24

'The writer has an extraordinary sense of atmosphere.' *Times Literary Supplement*

'Stories told convincingly and well, with a keen perception for natural beauty.' *Nation*

KOMROFF, Manuel

CONTEMPORARIES OF MARCO POLO *No.* 123

This volume comprises the Travel Records in the Eastern parts of the world of William of Rubruck (1253–5), the Journey of John of Pian de Carpini (1245–7), the Journey of Friar Odoric (1318–30). They describe the marvels and wonders of Asia under the Khans.

THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO *No.* 59

When Marco Polo arrived at the court of the Great Khan, Pekin had just been rebuilt. Kublai Khan was at the height of his glory. Polo rose rapidly in favour and became governor of an important district. In this way he gained first-hand knowledge of a great civilisation and described it with astounding accuracy and detail.

LAWRENCE, A. W., edited by

CAPTIVES OF TIPU. Survivors' Narratives *No.* 125

Three records of heroic endurance, which were hitherto unobtainable at a reasonable price. In addition to the well-known stories of Bristow and Scurry, a soldier and a seaman, who were forcibly Mohammedanised and retained in the service of Mysore till their escape after ten years, extracts are given from an officer's diary of his close imprisonment at Seringapatam.

LAWRENCE, D. H.

TWILIGHT IN ITALY. Travel essays *No.* 19

This volume of travel vignettes in North Italy was first published in 1916. Since then Mr. Lawrence has increased the number of his admirers year by year. In *Twilight in Italy* they will find all the freshness and vigour of outlook which they have come to expect from its author.

LAWSON, Henry

WHILE THE BILLY BOILS. First Series *No.* 38

These stories are written by the O. Henry of Australia. They tell of men and dogs, of cities and plains, of gullies and ridges, of sorrow and happiness, and of the fundamental goodness that is hidden in the most unpromising of human soil.

WHILE THE BILLY BOILS. Second Series *No.* 39

Mr. Lawson has the uncanny knack of making the people he writes about almost violently alive. Whether he tells of jackeroos, bush children or drovers' wives, each one lingers in the memory long after we have closed the book.

LESLIE, Shane

THE END OF A CHAPTER *No.* 110

In this, his most famous book, Mr. Shane Leslie has preserved for future generations the essence of the pre-war epoch, its institutions and individuals. He writes of Eton, of the Empire, of Post-Victorianism, of the Politicians. . . . And whatever he touches upon, he brilliantly interprets.

LITHGOW, William

RARE ADVENTURES AND PAINEFULL PEREGRINATIONS (1582–1645). Edited and with Introduction by B. I. LAWRENCE *No.* 109

This is the book of a seventeenth-century Scotchman who walked over the Levant, North Africa and most of Europe, including Spain, where he was tortured by the Inquisition. An unscrupulous man, full of curiosity, his comments are diverting aad penetrating, his adventures remarkable.

LUBBOCK, Percy

EARLHAM. A portrait *No. 6*

'The book seems too intimate to be reviewed. We want to be allowed to read it, and to dream over it, and keep silence about it. His judgment is perfect, his humour is true and ready ; his touch light and prim ; his prose is exact and clean and full of music.' *Times*

ROMAN PICTURES. Studies *No. 21*

Pictures of life as it is lived – or has been or might be lived – among the pilgrims and colonists in Rome of more or less English speech. 'A book of whimsical originality and exquisite workmanship, and worthy of one of the best prose writers of our time.' *Sunday Times*

THE CRAFT OF FICTION. Critical essays *No. 5*

'No more substantial or more charming volume of criticism has been published in our time.' *Observer*

'To say that this is the best book on the subject is probably true ; but it is more to the point to say that it is the only one.' *Times Literary Supplement*

LYND, Robert

BOOKS AND AUTHORS. Critical essays *No. 135*

Critical essays on great writers of modern and other times. Among the modern writers we have appreciations of Mr. Max Beerbohm, Mr. Arnold Bennett and Mr. H. M. Tomlinson, while Herrick, Keats, Charles Lamb and Hawthorne are a few of the classical writers who are criticised in the book.

MACDONALD, The Rt. Hon. J. Ramsay

WANDERINGS AND EXCURSIONS. Essays *No. 132*

Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has been a wide traveller and reader, and has an uncommon power of bringing an individual eye – the eye of the artist – to bear upon whatever he sees.

MACHEN, Arthur

DOG AND DUCK. Essays *No.* 15

'As a literary artist, Mr. Arthur Machen has few living equals, and that is very far indeed from being his only, or even his greatest, claim on the suffrages of English readers.' *Sunday Times*

MASEFIELD, John

CAPTAIN MARGARET. A Novel *No.* 35

'His style is crisp, curt and vigorous. He has the Stevensonian sea-swagger, the Stevensonian sense of beauty and poetic spirit. Mr. Masefield's descriptions ring true and his characters carry conviction.' *The Observer*

MASON, Arthur

THE FLYING BO'SUN. A Tale *No.* 47

'What makes the book remarkable is the imaginative power which has re-created these events so vividly that even the supernatural ones come with the shock and the conviction with which actual supernatural events might come.' *From the Introduction by* EDWIN MUIR

WIDE SEAS AND MANY LANDS. Reminiscences.
With an Introduction by MAURICE BARING *No.* 7

'This is an extremely entertaining, and at the same time moving, book. We are in the presence of a born writer. We read with the same mixture of amazement and delight that fills us throughout a Conrad novel.' *New Statesman*

MAUGHAM, W. Somerset

LIZA OF LAMBETH. A Tale *No.* 141

Liza of Lambeth is W. Somerset Maugham's first novel, and its publication decided the whole course of his life. For if it had not succeeded its author could not have turned from medicine to letters, and his subsequent triumphs might never have been achieved. Originally published in 1897, it has since passed through eight editions before its present inclusion in the Travellers' Library. The story reflects much of the experience which Mr. Maugham gathered when he worked in the slums of the East End as a doctor.

MAUGHAM, W. Somerset

ON A CHINESE SCREEN. Sketches *No.* 31

A collection of sketches of life in China. Mr. Somerset Maugham writes with equal certainty and vigour whether his characters are Chinese or European. There is a tenderness and humour about the whole book which makes the reader turn eagerly to the next page for more.

THE CASUARINA TREE. Stories *No.* 92

Intensely dramatic stories in which the stain of the East falls deeply on the lives of English men and women. Mr. Maugham remains cruelly aloof from his characters. On passion and its culminating tragedy he looks with unmoved detachment, ringing the changes without comment and yet with little cynicism.

THE MOON AND SIXPENCE. A Novel *No.* 9

A remarkable picture of a genius.

'Mr. Maugham has given us a ruthless and penetrating study in personality with a savage truthfulness of delineation and an icy contempt for the heroic and the sentimental.' *The Times*

MENCKEN, H. L.

IN DEFENCE OF WOMEN *No.* 50

'All I design by the book is to set down in more or less plain form certain ideas that practically every civilised man and woman hold *in petto*, but that have been concealed hitherto by the vast mass of sentimentalities swathing the whole woman question.' *From the Author's Introduction*

SELECTED PREJUDICES. First Series. A Book of Essays *No.* 8

'He is exactly the kind of man we are needing, an iconoclast, a scoffer at ideals, a critic with whips and scorpions who does not hesitate to deal with literary, social and political humbugs in the one slashing fashion.' *English Review*

SELECTED PREJUDICES. Second Series *No.* 60

'What a master of the straight left in appreciation! Everybody who wishes to see how common sense about books and authors can be made exhilarating should acquire this delightful book.' *Morning Post*

MEYNELL, Alice

WAYFARING. Essays *No.* 133

'Her essays have the merit of saying just enough of the subject, and they can be read repeatedly. The surprise coming from that combined grace of manner and sanity of thought is like one's dream of what the recognition of a new truth would be.' Some of the essays so described by George Meredith are here collected in book-form for the first time.

MITCHISON, Naomi

CLOUD CUCKOO LAND. A Novel of Sparta *No.* 88

'Rich and frank in passions, and rich, too, in the detail which helps to make feigned life seemed real.' *Times Literary Supplement*

THE CONQUERED. A story of the Gauls under Cæsar *No.* 45

'With *The Conquered* Mrs. Mitchison establishes herself as the best, if not the only, English historical novelist now writing. It seems to me in many respects the most attractive and poignant historical novel I have ever read.' *New Statesman*

WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS. Stories of the time when Rome was crumbling to ruin *No.* 46

'Interesting, delightful and fresh as morning dew. The connoisseur in short stories will turn to some pages in this volume again and again with renewed relish.' *Times Literary Supplement*

MONTAGU, Lady Mary Wortley

THE TRAVEL LETTERS OF LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU. Edited by A. W. LAWRENCE *No.* 143

The famous account of Lady Mary's journey to the East in 1716, describing her visits to the German Courts and her residence in Constantinople. In the words of a review by Tobias Smollett: 'The publication of these *Letters* will be an immortal monument to the memory of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and will show, as long as the English language endures, the sprightliness of her wit, the solidity of her judgment, the elegance of her taste, and the excellence of her real character. These letters are so bewitchingly entertaining, that we defy the most phlegmatic man on earth to read one without going through with them.'

MOORE, George

CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN *No. 76*

'Mr. Moore, true to his period and to his genius, stripped himself of everything that might stand between him and the achievement of his artistic object. He does not ask you to admire this George Moore. He merely asks you to observe him beyond good and evil as a constant plucked from the bewildering flow of eternity.' *Humbert Wolfe*

MORLEY, Christopher

SAFETY PINS. Essays. With an Introduction by H.M. TOMLINSON *No. 98*

Very many readers will be glad of the opportunity to meet Mr Morley in the rôle of the gentle essayist. He is an author who is content to move among his fellows, to note, to reflect, and to write genially and urbanely ; to love words for their sound as well as for their value in expression of thought.

THUNDER ON THE LEFT. A Novel *No. 90*

'It is personal to every reader, it will become for every one a reflection of himself. I fancy that here, as always where work is fine and true, the author has created something not as he would but as he must, and is here an interpreter of a world more wonderful than he himself knows.' *Hugh Walpole*

WHERE THE BLUE BEGINS. A Fantasy *No. 74*

A delicious satirical fantasy in which humanity wears a dog-collar. 'Mr. Morley is a master of consequent inconsequence. His humour and irony are excellent, and his satire is only the more salient for the delicate and ingenuous fantasy in which it is set.' *Manchester Guardian*

MURRAY, Max

THE WORLD'S BACK DOORS. Adventures. With an Introduction by HECTOR BOLITHO *No. 61*

This book is not an account so much of places as of people. The journey round the world was begun with about enough money to buy one meal, and continued for 66,000 miles. There are periods as a longshore man and as a sailor, and a Chinese guard and a night watchman, and as a hobo.

MURRY, J. Middleton

THE EVOLUTION OF AN INTELLECTUAL *No.* 62

These essays were written during and immediately after the Great War. The author says that they record the painful stages by which he passed from the so-called intellectual state to the state of being what he now considers to be a reasonable man.

O'FLAHERTY, Liam

SPRING SOWING. Stories *No.* 26

'Nothing seems to escape Mr. O'Flaherty's eye ; his brain turns all things to drama ; and his vocabulary is like a river in spate. *Spring Sowing* is a book to buy, or to borrow, or, yes, to steal.' *Bookman*

THE BLACK SOUL. A Novel *No.* 99

'*The Black Soul* overwhelms one like a storm. . . . Nothing like it has been written by any Irish writer.' 'Æ' in *The Irish Statesman*

THE INFORMER. A Novel *No.* 128

This realistic novel of the Dublin underworld is generally conceded to be Mr. O'Flaherty's most outstanding book. It is to be produced as a film by British International Pictures, who regard it as one of the most ambitious of their efforts.

O'NEILL, Eugene

THE MOON OF THE CARIBBEES, AND OTHER PLAYS OF THE SEA. With an Introduction by ST. JOHN ERVINE *No.* 116

'Mr. O'Neill is immeasurably the most interesting man of letters that America has produced since the death of Walt Whitman.' *From the Introduction*

O'SHAUGHNESSY, Edith

VIENNESE MEDLEY. A Novel *No.* 51

'It is told with infinite tenderness, with many touches of grave or poignant humour, in a very beautiful book, which no lover of fiction should allow to pass unread. A book which sets its writer definitely in the first rank of living English novelists.' *Sunday Times*

PATER, Walter

MARIUS THE EPICUREAN *No. 23*

Walter Pater was at the same time a scholar of wide sympathies and a master of the English language. In this, his best-known work, he describes with rare delicacy of feeling and insight the religious and philosophic tendencies of the Roman Empire at the time of Antoninus Pius as they affected the mind and life of the story's hero.

THE RENAISSANCE *No. 63*

This English classic contains studies of those 'supreme artists' Michelangelo and Da Vinci, and of Botticelli, Della Robia, Mirandola, and others, who 'have a distinct faculty of their own by which they convey to us a peculiar quality of pleasure which we cannot get elsewhere.' There is no romance or subtlety in the work of these masters too fine for Pater to distinguish in superb English.

PICKTHALL, Marmaduke

ORIENTAL ENCOUNTERS *No. 103*

In *Oriental Encounters*, Mr. Pickthall relives his earlier manhood's discovery of Arabia and sympathetic encounters with the Eastern mind. He is one of the few travellers who really bridges the racial gulf.

POWELL, Sydney Walter

THE ADVENTURES OF A WANDERER *No. 64*

Throwing up a position in the Civil Service in Natal because he preferred movement and freedom to monotony and security, the author started his wanderings by enlisting in an Indian Ambulance Corps in the South African War. Afterwards he wandered all over the world.

POWYS, Llewelyn

BLACK LAUGHTER *No. 127*

Black Laughter is a kind of *Robinson Crusoe* of the continent of Africa. Indeed, Llewelyn Powys resembles Daniel Defoe in the startlingly realistic manner in which he conveys the actual feelings of the wild places he describes. You actually share the sensations of a sensitive and artistic nature suddenly transplanted from a peaceful English village into the heart of Africa.

RANSOME, Arthur

'RACUNDRA'S' FIRST CRUISE *No. 65*

This is the story of the building of an ideal yacht which would be a cruising boat that one man could manage if need be, but on which three people could live comfortably. The adventures of the cruise are skilfully and vividly told.

READE, Winwood

THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN *No. 66*

'Few sketches of universal history by one single author have been written. One book that has influenced me very strongly is *The Martyrdom of Man*. This "dates," as people say nowadays, and it has a fine gloom of its own ; but it is still an extraordinarily inspiring presentation of human history as one consistent process.' H. G. WELLS *in An Outline of History*

REYNOLDS, Stephen

A POOR MAN'S HOUSE *No. 93*

Vivid and intimate pictures of a Devonshire fisherman's life. 'Compact, harmonious, without a single – I won't say false – but uncertain note, true in aim, sentiment and expression, precise and imaginative, never precious, but containing here and there an absolutely priceless phrase. . . .' *Joseph Conrad*

RIESENBERG, Felix

SHIPMATES. Sea-faring portraits *No. 107*

A collection of intimate character-portraits of men with whom the author has sailed on many voyages. The sequence of studies blends into a fascinating panorama of living characters.

ROBERTS, Captain George

THE FOUR YEARS VOYAGES *No. 40*

The Manner of his being taken by Three Pyrate Ships which, after having plundered him, and detained him 10 Days, put him aboard his own Sloop, without Provisions, Water, etc.

The Hardships he endur'd for above 20 Days, 'till he arriv'd at the Island of St. Nicholas, from whence he was blown off to Sea ; and after Four Days of Difficulty and Distress, was Shipwreck'd on the Unfrequented Island of St. John, where, after he had remained near two Years, he built a Vessel to bring himself off.

ROBINSON, James Harvey

THE MIND IN THE MAKING. An Essay *No.* 9

'For me, I think James Harvey Robinson is going to be almost as important as was Huxley in my adolescence, and William James in later years. It is a cardinal book. I question whether in the long run people may not come to it, as making a new initiative into the world's thought and methods.' *From the Introduction by* H. G. WELLS

ROSEBERY, The Earl of

NAPOLEON: THE LAST PHASE *No.* 96

Of books and memoirs about Napoleon there is indeed no end, but of the veracious books such as this there are remarkably few. It aims to penetrate the deliberate darkness which surrounds the last act of the Napoleonic drama.

RUTHERFORD, Mark

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK RUTHERFORD.
With an Introduction by H. W. MASSINGHAM *No.* 67

Because of its honesty, delicacy and simplicity of portraiture, this book has always had a curious grip upon the affections of its readers. An English Amiel, inheriting to his comfort an English Old Crome landscape, he freed and strengthened his own spirit as he will his reader's.

THE DELIVERANCE *No.* 68

Once read, Hale White [Mark Rutherford] is never forgotten. But he is not yet approached through the highways of English letters. To the lover of his work, nothing can be more attractive than the pure and serene atmosphere of thought in which his art moves.

THE REVOLUTION IN TANNER'S LANE *No.* 69

'Since Bunyan, English Puritanism has produced one imaginative genius of the highest order. To my mind, our fiction contains no more perfectly drawn pictures of English life in its recurring emotional contrast of excitement and repose more valuable to the historian, or more stimulating to the imaginative reader.' *H. W. Massingham*

SHELVOCKE, Captain George

A PRIVATEER'S VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD. With aspersions upon him by WILLIAM BETAGH. Edited by A. W. LAWRENCE *No.* 142

A book of 1726, well known as the source of the albatross incident and other passages in the 'Ancient Mariner'; it describes the exploits of a private ship of war on the coasts of South America, its wreck on the Crusoe island off Juan Fernandez, and the subsequent adventures of its company in various parts of the Pacific.

Few among the true stories of the sea can rival this in psychological interest, because of the diverse villainies of captain and crew. Shelvocke was arrested on his return to England, for a successful conspiracy to defraud his owners of their due percentage of the profits, and he then wrote his book to defend his conduct.

SITWELL, Constance

FLOWERS AND ELEPHANTS. With an Introduction by E. M. FORSTER *No.* 115

Mrs. Sitwell has known India well, and has filled her pages with many vivid little pictures, and with sounds and scents. But it is the thread on which her impressions are strung that is so fascinating, a thread so delicate and rare that the slightest clumsiness in definition would snap it.

SMITH, Pauline

THE BEADLE. A Novel of South Africa *No.* 129

'A story of great beauty, and told with simplicity and tenderness that makes it linger in the memory. It is a notable contribution to the literature of the day.' *Morning Post*

THE LITTLE KAROO. Stories of South Africa. With an Introduction by ARNOLD BENNETT *No.* 104

'Nothing like this has been written about South African life since Olive Schreiner and her *Story of an African Farm* took the literary world by storm.' *The Daily Telegraph*

SQUIRE, J. C.

THE GRUB STREET NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENTS *No.* 102

Stories of literary life, told with a breath of fantasy and gaily ironic humour. Each character lives, and is the more lively for its touch of caricature. From *The Man Who Kept a Diary* to *The Man Who Wrote Free Verse*, these tales constitute Mr. Squire's most delightful ventures in fiction ; and the conception of the book itself is unique.

SULLIVAN, J. W. N.

ASPECTS OF SCIENCE. First Series *No.* 70

Although they deal with different aspects of various scientific ideas, the papers which make up this volume do illustrate, more or less, one point of view. This book tries to show one or two of the many reasons why science may be interesting for people who are not specialists as well as for those who are.

SYMONS, Arthur

PLAYS, ACTING AND MUSIC *No.* 113

This book deals mainly with music and with the various arts of the stage. Mr. Arthur Symons shows how each art has its own laws, its own limits ; these it is the business of the critic jealously to distinguish. Yet in the study of art as art it should be his endeavour to master the universal science of beauty.

WILLIAM BLAKE. A critical study *No.* 94

When Blake spoke the first word of the nineteenth century there was none to hear it ; and now that his message has penetrated the world, and is slowly remaking it, few are conscious of the man who first voiced it. This lack of knowledge is remedied in Mr. Symons's work.

TCHEKOFF, Anton

TWO PLAYS : *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Sea Gull.*
Translated by GEORGE CALDERON *No.* 33

Tchekoff had that fine comedic spirit which relishes the incongruity between the actual disorder of the world with the underlying order. He habitually mingled tragedy (which is life seen close at hand) with comedy (which is life seen at a distance). His plays are tragedies with the texture of comedy.

THOMAS, Edward

A LITERARY PILGRIM IN ENGLAND *No. 95*

A book about the homes and resorts of English writers, from John Aubrey, Cowper, Gilbert White, Cobbett, Wordsworth, Burns, Borrow and Lamb, to Swinburne, Stevenson, Meredith, W. H. Hudson and H. Belloc. Each chapter is a miniature biography and the same time a picture of the man and his work and environment.

THE POCKET BOOK OF POEMS AND SONGS FOR THE OPEN AIR *No. 97*

This anthology is meant to please those lovers of poetry and the country who like a book that can always lighten some of their burdens or give wings to their delight, whether in the open air by day, or under the roof at evening ; in it is gathered much of the finest English poetry.

TURGENEV, Ivan

FATHERS AND CHILDREN. Translated by CONSTANCE GARNETT *No. 83*

'As a piece of art *Fathers and Children* is the most powerful of all Turgenev's works. The figure of Bazarov is not only the political centre of the book, but a figure in which the eternal tragedy of man's impotence and insignificance is realised in scenes of a most ironical human drama.' *Edward Garnett*

ON THE EVE. Translated by CONSTANCE GARNETT *No. 82*

In his characters is something of the width and depth which so astounds us in the creations of Shakespeare. *On the Eve* is a quiet work, yet over which the growing consciousness of coming events casts its heavy shadow. Turgenev, even as he sketched the ripening love of a young girl, has made us feel the dawning aspirations o. a nation.

SMOKE. Translated by CONSTANCE GARNETT *No. 84*

In this novel Turgenev sees and reflects, even in the shifting phases of political life, that which is universal in human nature. His work is compassionate, beautiful, unique ; in the sight of his fellow-craftsmen always marvellous and often perfect.

VERGA, Giovanni

MASTRO-DON GESUALDO. A Novel. Translated by D. H. LAWRENCE *No.* 71

Verga, who died in 1922, is recognised as one of the greatest of Italian writers of fiction. He can claim a place beside Hardy and the Russians. 'It is a fine full tale, a fine full picture of life, with a bold beauty of its own which Mr. Lawrence must have relished greatly as he translated it.' *Observer*

VOIGT, F. A.

COMBED OUT *No.* 122

This account of life in the army in 1917-18, both at home and in France, is written with a telling incisiveness. The author does not indulge in an unnecessary word, but packs in just the right details with an intensity of feeling that is infectious.

WATERS, W. G.

TRAVELLER'S JOY. An Anthology *No.* 106

This anthology has been selected for publication in the Travellers' Library from among the many collections of verse because of its suitability for the traveller, particularly the summer and autumn traveller, who would like to carry with him some store of literary provender.

WELLS, H. G.

CHRISTINA ALBERTA'S FATHER. A Novel *No.* 100

'At first reading the book is utterly beyond criticism; all the characters are delightfully genuine.' *Spectator*

'Brimming over with Wellsian insight, humour and invention. No one but Mr. Wells could have written the whole book and given it such verve and sparkle.' *Westminster Gazette*

THE DREAM. A Novel *No.* 20

'It is the richest, most generous and absorbing thing that Mr. Wells has given us for years and years.' *Daily News*

'I find this book as close to being magnificent as any book that I have ever read. It is full of inspiration and life.' *Daily Graphic*

WHARTON, Edith

IN MOROCCO *No.* 41

Morocco is a land of mists and mysteries, of trailing silver veils through which minarets, mighty towers, hot palm groves and Atlas snows peer and disappear at the will of the Atlantic cloud-drifts.

ITALIAN BACKGROUNDS *No.* 114

Mrs. Wharton's perception of beauty and her grace of writing are matters of general acceptance. Her book gives us pictures of mountains and rivers, monks, nuns and saints.

WITHERS, Percy

FRIENDS IN SOLITUDE. With an Introduction by LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE *No.* 131

Percy Withers, who lived for many years in the Lake Country, has his own experiences to relate ; but in seeking to widen them and to give them more vivid expression, he selects certain of the dale folk, his friends and companions, to tell in their own fashion so much the manner of men they are, so much of their life-story, of its prosperities, endurances, pathos, its reactions and responses to the outward circumstances as may make the picture more complete and give to it a more human significance.

YOUNG, E. H.

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